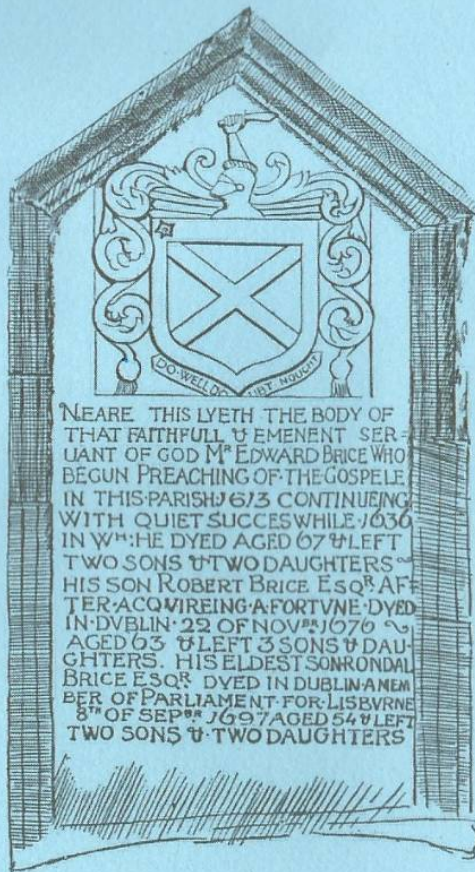


Edward Brice  
And the  
Origins of Presbyterianism  
In Ireland



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*Rev. Dr. J. W. Nelson*  
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## PREFACE

In Ballycarry the name of Edward Brice has long been held in honour and his grave, within the ruins of the old church, viewed as a landmark of special interest. His role in the re-establishment of church life in this area, in the early days of the Plantation, is enough to earn him a place on the succession lists of the three churches in the village. Of much wider interest is the fact that Brice was the first of a band of Scots ministers who, coming to Ulster, found parishes within the church of Ireland, but who proceeded to conduct those parishes and their wider church life upon Presbyterian principles. In later years they were ejected for their non-conformity, but not before they had laid the foundations upon which subsequent Irish Presbyterianism was built. On this basis Edward Brice may legitimately be referred to as the First Presbyterian Minister in Ireland.

I am most grateful to the Presbyterian Historical Society for the opportunity to deliver this lecture in the fitting location of Ballycarry Old Presbyterian Church, my own congregation. I am also most grateful to the Society for their support in publication and for their general encouragement. Within the membership of this society is a wide range of those most active in Irish Presbyterian historical study and this, coupled with the excellent resources of the Society's library and archive, cannot fail to be a stimulus to anyone interested in the field.

It is highly appropriate that the Quadricentenary of the arrival of Edward Brice be marked both in the local context of Ballycarry and, through this modest publication, in the wider church context.

J.W.Nelson

Ballycarry

26<sup>th</sup>. January 2013

At some point in the Summer of 1613 a minister, together with his wife and family, crossed the North Channel from Scotland. They arrived on the coast of Co. Antrim, somewhere near to modern Whitehead and made their way to Ballycarry, to the house known as Redhall. The minister's name was Edward Brice and he had been invited by Sir William Edmonstone, the owner of Redhall, to begin a new life and ministry in Ireland.

Brice, or Bryce, or Bruce, the name is spelt variously, was born in 1569 in Airth, Stirlingshire and may have been connected to the gentry family of Bruce of Airth. Certainly the coat of arms and motto of the Airth Bruces is engraved on his headstone. He studied at Edinburgh University and took the degree of MA in 1593. After studying divinity he entered the ministry in the parish of Bothkennar on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1596. Six years later he transferred to the parish of Drymen, near to the southern end of Loch Lomond, where he was installed on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1602.<sup>1</sup> At that time he probably thought that he would remain as minister there for the rest of his life.

Sir William Edmonstone was the proprietor of the Broad Island estate, which embraced not only the modern village of Ballycarry, but extended to Larne Lough, the vicinity of Whitehead, and included parts of Magheramorne and Raloo. At this time he was working strenuously to populate and develop his new estate. In this he was very much in keeping with many other gentry and lesser nobility from Scotland and England who were at this period taking lands and estates in Ulster. While west of the Bann the Plantation was a carefully organised, state sponsored affair, in Antrim and Down it

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<sup>1</sup> Fasti Ecclesiae Scotianae Vol 3 Hew Scott DD 1920

proceeded on a free lance basis, with openings being sought by those who had an eye for opportunity. Edmonstone was an entrepreneur. While remaining Laird of Duntreath in Stirlingshire, in spite of being now resident in Ireland, he hoped, if not quite to make his fortune, certainly to set the family finances on a sound basis. The Edmonstones, like many others of the new landlords in Ulster were gentry not nobility and while they had financial resources, they were not wealthy. This was their opportunity to raise their status significantly.

In 1607 Sir William Edmonstone, with his brother James, came to the North Down area of Ulster where Sir Hugh Montgomery was beginning to develop his estates. There they leased two townlands from him, but within a year they realised that their prospects there were limited and if they were to have an estate in their own name they would need to look elsewhere. Enquiries were made and contact established with John Dalway of Bellahill near Carrickfergus. Negotiations resulted in the granting of a lease on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1609, whereby 2870 acres at Broadisland with various rights and privileges were passed to William Edmonstone in perpetuity for an annual rent of £160-9-4 Sterling.<sup>2</sup> The lands in Co. Down were rapidly given up and the Edmonstones moved to Ballycarry, where William resided in the house, known as Redhall, which already stood on the estate. While Edmonstone's mother continued to live at Duntreath, it rapidly became clear that for the foreseeable future Ballycarry was to be the centre of family activity.

While 2870 acres, together with a substantial "tower house", and various rights and privileges, would seem to constitute a substantial estate, there were limitations to what William

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<sup>2</sup>. Indenture 26<sup>th</sup>. May 1609 John Dalway to William Edmonstone

Edmonstone had taken possession of. Four miles away was Carrickfergus, a walled town with its famous castle, which was the seat of county government and in effect the main centre of English rule in Ulster. Yet Ballycarry itself scarcely existed. Some ruined buildings and perhaps a few inhabited ones, but only a very few. The wars of the previous two decades had brought waste and desolation across Ulster and, while the main conflict between the armies of Mountjoy and O'Neill had been further to the west, there had also been endemic warfare in Co. Antrim between the English in Carrickfergus and the Scots McDonnells from the glens, including a significant battle just outside Ballycarry in 1597. Such conflict invariably results in the countryside being laid waste and it has been said that Ulster at this time was "a very desert or wilderness" with the population of wolves on the increase.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly Edmonstone had one high priority. It was imperative that he should quickly bring in settlers, who would build houses, inhabit the land, and make the estate economically productive. There was a need for farming families which, together with a range of tradesmen would create a functioning community. While this presented challenges, it was made easier by the fact that there was now a steady trickle of settlers making their own way into Antrim and Down. While some were of English extraction, the great majority, especially in such an area as Ballycarry, were from Scotland. The very fact that on every clear day Scotland is visible from Ballycarry and of course the other way round, would tend to encourage such emigration.

The fact that many of the settlers were free agents, rather

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<sup>3</sup>. The Making of Modern Ireland J.C.Beckett Faber&Faber 1972 p23

than specifically recruited, meant that inevitably they would be a cross-section of society, with perhaps the emphasis on those who felt obliged to move for less than reputable reasons. The Rev. Andrew Stewart, writing in 1670, gave a colourful, and informed, description of these people:

“From Scotland came many and from England not a few, yet all of them generally the scum of both nations, who, for debt, or breaking and fleeing from justice, or seeking shelter, came hither, hoping to be without fear of man’s justice in a land where there was nothing, or but little as yet, of the fear of God.”<sup>4</sup>

There were also of course numbers of respectable, God fearing, people, but they were undoubtedly part of a varied community; all of whom were at the same time seeking to make a new beginning in what was, in many respects, a frontier settlement. Over the course of a few years Edmonstone got his farmers and residents, but he still wanted something more in keeping with what he had known at home in Scotland. That is, he sought a stable community with the elements and institutions of normal society, including the church.

Ballycarry had, at that time, four known church sites, representing the churches or chapels of Irvo, Lignalitter, Brackenberg and Lislynan although the first three of these were known more for the remains of their graveyards than any enduring church buildings. The fourth, Lislynan, was both the oldest, occupying the site of an early Christian monastic settlement and the one with the largest enduring structural remains. These walls, in the form of a Greek cross, represented a medieval building and, when William Edmonstone came to

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<sup>4</sup> History of the Church of Ireland after the Scots were Naturalised Andrew Stewart, appended to A True Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Patrick Adair Belfast 1866 p313

Ballycarry, would have been a significant feature of the landscape. There is no doubt that the settlers recognised this site as the location of their parish church and its adjoining graveyard as the place where they would bury their dead. The church building however remained derelict, its walls roofless and dilapidated.

The clergyman responsible for this area was the Rev. John Cotton, who on 10<sup>th</sup>. July 1609 was collated as Prebendary of Kilroot. He appears to have been the first Prebendary there as the corps of the Prebend of Kilroot was only established in 1609 to consist of the parishes of Kilroot, Templecorran (Ballycarry) and Ballynure.<sup>5</sup> This constituted a substantial area of responsibility, some ten miles by six, albeit with a limited population, but with no serviceable church building in any of the parishes. In effect there was no church presence in Ballycarry.

Among the various rights and privileges conferred on William Edmonstone by the lease of 26<sup>th</sup>. May 1609 was “the advowson, nomination, presentation and right of patronage of and to the rectory and vicarage of the parish church of Templecorran in Brayd Island.”<sup>6</sup> This meant that the Bishop would accept any tolerably educated, respectable and devout candidate who the owner of the advowson, that is the local landlord, saw fit to nominate. It did not mean that the Bishop was obliged to accept any candidate, but it did give the landlord a very considerable degree of influence.

This must be set against the background of the current state of the Church of Ireland at the time. The church was chronically short of manpower and its clergy were largely

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<sup>5</sup>. Clergy of Connor Canon J.B.Leslie Ulster Historical Foundation 1993 pp 48 & 162

<sup>6</sup>. Indenture 26<sup>th</sup>. May 1609 as cited



expatriate English or Scots. Across Ulster, the years of warfare had injured the church in almost every respect and left it weak and barely capable of functioning, even at a very basic level. In the visitation returns for the Diocese of Down and Connor for the year 1622<sup>7</sup> the phrases “church decayed” or “church ruinous” are often repeated and it is apparent that many clergy were serving two or three parishes simultaneously. This position was common across Ulster and one may be certain that a decade earlier this exactly described the situation in Ballycarry.

At around that period however, the position was beginning to change. With a cessation of warfare and a new political situation, a steady influx of settlers was coming to Ulster. In East Antrim a very high proportion of these were from Scotland and so it seemed highly logical that a Scots minister should be found who could both speak to them in their native tongue and reflect the life and customs which they had known at home.

This point was not lost upon the Bishop of Down and Connor, Robert Echlin, who was himself a Scot. Echlin was the son of a Fifeshire laird and after study at the University of St. Andrews became minister of the second congregation of Inverkeithing in Fife in 1601. There he remained until he was appointed by King James to the Bishoprics of Down and Connor on 4<sup>th</sup>. March 1613.<sup>8</sup> He knew very well the position of the Church of Scotland and the views of its ministers and, although happy to serve as a Bishop himself, was not so vehemently opposed to Presbyterian principles that he was not prepared to reach an accommodation with ministers of that

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<sup>7</sup> History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Vol. I J.S.Reid  
Ed. W.D.Killen Belfast 1867 Appendix p521

<sup>8</sup> Dictionary of National Biography Vol. XVI  
Dictionary of Irish Biography Vol. 3

persuasion. In this he was joined by Andrew Knox, Bishop of Raphoe 1611-1633, who willingly facilitated ordination services which had little more than nodding acquaintance with Anglican ritual. Together these two Bishops made possible the entry into parishes of the Church of Ireland of a significant number of Scots ministers of decidedly Presbyterian views.

In Ballycarry William Edmonstone sought such a minister who would be at home amongst the new Scots settlers and who would re-establish the Kirk in that community. He did not have to seek far, for within the network of Stirlingshire connections which he knew well, was the name of Edward Brice, minister of Drymen. Contact was made and an invitation extended. In this Edmonstone was not alone for he was followed by others such as Sir James Hamilton who made it his business to bring ministers out of Scotland for the parishes of his estate.<sup>9</sup>

There remains however the question of why a minister such as a Brice would consider leaving a settled parish in Scotland for the uncertainties of Ireland, which common wisdom in Scotland held was a wilderness, where the inhabitants fought endlessly with each other and with everyone else. Unless, of course, Edward Brice had strong reasons to move.

In his youth the Scots Reformation was still young and the zeal of the early reformers was still strongly felt. Their opinions emphasised the rejection of ceremonies, the keeping of the Sabbath but not of Holy Days, public baptism of infants, the reception of Communion seated and the parity of all ministers which obviously excluded rule by Bishops. These and similar principles were enshrined in the mind of Brice and many others of his generation, and would have been fundamental to his

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<sup>9</sup>. Presbyterian Worship in Ulster prior to the Introduction of the Westminster Directory in 1647 W.D.Bailie PHSI 1987 Note 1

ministry.

The Church of Scotland however, was not yet the settled body which later generations would know. King James VI resented the authority which the Kirk exercised over him, and its influence over the affairs of state. When he attained his majority in 1587 and, with it his own personal authority, he began to make plans to change the situation. Part of this policy was the re-introduction of Bishops. At first their titles and roles were purely nominal, but by degrees their influence, and through them, the King's control over the church, was gradually extended.

A month after accession of King James to the throne of England, James Beaton, the former Archbishop of Glasgow, died and the King took the opportunity to appoint John Spottiswood as his successor. Spottiswood had earlier been allied to the reforming party in the Kirk, as indeed his father had been, but by 1600 he had changed to be a resolute supporter of the King. This was seen in his new found authority as Archbishop of Glasgow which Spottiswood actively proceeded to enforce and increase. He did this not only by standing upon his dignity, but also by showing his active disapproval towards those who opposed him or were obviously pillars of the Presbyterian party. This group included Edward Brice.

One of Spottiswood's means of advancing his authority and that of Episcopacy in general, was to have himself accepted in 1607 as permanent Moderator of the Synod of Clydesdale. The very concept was thoroughly anti- Presbyterian and Brice made his opposition known. While the famous, or infamous, Five Articles of Perth were still a few years in the future, it was

also well known that the minister of Drymen resolutely rejected the view of the church which they would later enshrine. Such strong and persistent opposition to the new order made Brice a marked man. While he was aware that the nomination to the parish of Drymen was a royal appointment and he may have feared the use of some form of royal prerogative against him, in the event other, and more devious means, would be used to blacken his name and edge him out of office. By the period 1610-1613 Edward Brice must have been continually anxious about his future position and ministry.

This leads to the curious matter of his being charged with adultery. Particular details of the charge are not forthcoming, but it seems probable that the charge was brought against him at the end of 1612, or beginning of 1613. The implication is that the middle aged Brice, he was now 44, in spite of having a wife and family, was at best morally lax, or at worst a disgrace to the ministry, meriting not only the condemnation of the church, but also the full penalties of the civil law. However, it remains the fact that for the next 23 years Brice was to work in Ireland, with and beside a number of fellow Scots ministers, who knew him and his background and who certainly knew others who knew him or could inquire about his past. These ministers were, to a man, strong puritans and would have taken the deepest exception to a minister of whom they thought such charges might even possibly be true. Therefore, their co-operation with Brice, and their support of him and the absence of any condemnation or rejection on their part may be taken as strong evidence that the charge was without foundation and probably fabricated.

The case advanced through the course of 1613, and given

the power and influence ranked against him, Brice can have been in no doubt as to the likely outcome. On 29<sup>th</sup>. December 1613 Edward Brice was formally deposed for adultery by Archbishop Spottiswood and the Presbytery of Glasgow. However no further action would ever be taken in Scotland, for Brice had already left his charge of Drymen, had crossed the North Channel, and was settled in Ballycarry.

It would be foolish to suggest that Brice entered lightly upon this move. While his age of 44 years seems young to modern minds, in the early seventeenth century it was well into middle age. He had the responsibility of a wife and family, one son, Robert, being either an infant in arms at the time of his coming over or born very shortly afterwards. The sea crossing itself was hazardous and the reputation of Ireland only too well known.

Such doubts as he may have had would have been reinforced by what he saw on landing. The first substantial building to be seen was the newly built Castle Chichester, a fortified tower house. When he reached Redhall, the home of his patron William Edmonstone, he would have found another fortified tower house. Just to the south of the village he would have seen the newly built Dalway's Bawn, a large fortified house and enclosure and a little to the north of the village doubtless someone could have pointed out to him the graves of those who fell at the battle of Aldfreck only sixteen years previously. Brice must have wondered what kind of place he had come to.

There were Scots people around him, but the numbers were relatively small, and the new community obviously at a fairly early stage. It would be reasonable to assume that Brice had

many questions. One factor however seemed to offer a firm foundation, and that was the presence and support of William Edmonstone. We cannot be certain to what extent Brice and Edmonstone knew each other back in Scotland, but at the very least Brice would have known Edmonstone by reputation and been confident that he would support him in the reformed, Presbyterian form of churchmanship which Brice had so clearly espoused.

The first element of that support was in the expected nomination to Bishop Echlin, who later in the course of 1613 admitted Brice as Rector of the parish of Templecorran, which coincided with most of the Broadisland or Ballycarry estate. It may be wondered how a Presbyterian of such resolute views as Brice could bring himself to serve in an Episcopalian church and to accept, even at a modest level, the authority of a Bishop. The answer may be gleaned from the experience of Robert Blair which, although ten years later, gives a fair insight into the attitude of Bishop Echlin. Blair made it clear to the Bishop that he was strongly opposed to "Episcopacy and their liturgy", but Echlin replied: "I hear good of you and will impose no conditions upon you. Indeed with regard to Blair's ordination Echlin asked "will you not receive ordination from Mr. Cunningham and the adjacent brethren and let me come in amongst them in no other relation than a presbyter?" upon which Blair commented "This I could not refuse and so the matter was performed."<sup>10</sup> While Brice did not need to seek ordination in Ireland, there seems little doubt that Echlin received him kindly, completed the documents of appointment and, knowing his Presbyterian views, did not seek to impose

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<sup>10</sup>. Robert Blair of Bangor PHSI 2011 pp108-109

conditions upon him. Thus the relationship was amicable and probably somewhat distant, with Brice free to do what he pleased in his parish of Templecorran.

By the time of his settlement in Ballycarry Brice had been in the ministry for seventeen years and was well versed in his duties, but his new parish was unlike anything which he had known in Scotland. It is likely that at first he and his family were accommodated in or about Redhall. At some point thereafter a specific house or manse would have been provided and local tradition suggests that this may have been at the Wellhead, on the hill to the west side of Whitehead.<sup>11</sup> However, while Brice and his family found accommodation, there was still no usable church building in the parish. Reference had already been made to the walls of the old church of Lislynan, but it rapidly became clear that the renovation and re-roofing of this building would be a major task. The new settlers were poor and needed whatever small resources they may have had to build their own homes and to stock their farms. Nor was William Edmonstone able to meet such costs, for in these early years he had many calls upon his resources, not least a major renovation and extension which he intended to make to Redhall itself.

Only in 1622, a full nine years after the arrival of Edward Brice, was the old church finally restored.<sup>12</sup> What is significant is not merely that this work was eventually done, but that considerable additional work and expense was incurred for reasons which had nothing to do with the church. Reference has been made to Redhall, half a mile to the north of the village and to Dalway's Bawn, one mile to the south of the village,

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<sup>11</sup>. Whitehead the Town with No Streets P.J.O'Donnell p11

<sup>12</sup>. J.S.Reid op cit

both being fortified buildings and therefore places of refuge. Now, when the restoration of the church was under consideration, it was felt that there was need for a further fortified building, close to the village and plans for the church were adapted to make allowance for this. A building with a slated roof might be defended and, as there was no local supply of slate, this had to be brought in at considerable expense. Of equal importance was the modification of the walls to take twelve musket loopholes. These were carefully positioned to ensure that every line of approach to the building was covered. In short the renovation of 1622 created not merely a serviceable church, but also a fort.<sup>13</sup>

That this should have been felt necessary in Ballycarry, within sight of Scotland, says much about the sense of insecurity which still troubled the settlers. While the major wars were twenty years past there seemed to be an enduring fear that the Irish would rise against the English and Scots and that, perhaps even here, in the heartland of the new Plantation, such attacks might pose a very real threat. The fears were not fulfilled. Even during the dire events at the end of 1641 Ballycarry was not attacked and there is no evidence that a single shot was ever fired in anger through any of the musket loopholes.

From this point on Edward Brice had a church in which to officiate, and where he might accommodate the bulk of his parishioners on any given occasion. It would have been the custom of the time to conduct two services on the Lord's Day, one in the fore noon, or classically at twelve noon and the other in the afternoon. Brice may have followed this pattern or may

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<sup>13</sup>. The Templecorran Project D.T.Hume and J.W.Nelson 2011



have held one service in the church and another in someone's house or barn, or in the open air, as he had been accustomed to do in the days before the church was available. In this way he was able to conduct worship in various parts of his large parish, and maintain contact with more of his people. The number of services however might also have been varied according to the weather and the season of the year, as winter limited the available hours of daylight.

While there is very limited information regarding Edward Brice as a parish minister, other knowledge regarding his colleagues and contemporaries makes it possible to form some understanding of his services and practice as a minister. Given that the Scriptures would have been the basis of his faith and worship, it is important to note that the Bible which he used would almost certainly not have been the King James or Authorised Version, which appeared in 1611, or less than two years before he came to Ulster. The translation most used before that time and which continued in favour in Scotland for a generation afterwards, was the Geneva Bible. It is highly likely that this was the text from which Brice read, week-by-week.

Public worship also requires an element of praise. It goes without saying that the praise favoured by Brice and his colleagues was the singing of Metrical Psalms, without the accompaniment of any musical instrument. This however could create problems in a rural parish such as Ballycarry. While various Scottish Psalm books were in print from 1564 onwards, the actual number available in Ulster would have been very limited. In addition it would be wrong to assume too high a level of literacy among the general population at that time.

However the difficulties of making the words known would have been compounded by a shortage of persons capable of acting as Precentor, that is of giving out the tune and leading the singing. There is an instance in Co. Down at this period of one precentor serving several different congregations and one should not assume that Ballycarry would necessarily have had the services of a Precentor. The remaining alternative would have been for Brice to lead the praise himself. It is probable that in the early years of his ministry he would have given a high priority to making sure that the most active members of his congregation would know by heart the words of a number of portions of Psalms, and the tunes commonly in use for them.

In prayer Brice would have offered adoration, confession, lamenting the sins of the people and the nation and petition, asking for a blessing upon his people, for their protection and deliverance and for the Lord's hand to rest upon the affairs of their land and nation. All of this possibly at some length. The most significant part of the service by far however was the sermon. The congregation sat, on seats or stools which they had brought with them, to hear a sermon commonly lasting for an hour or more. It was the custom that men should sit with their hats on during the time of sermon.<sup>14</sup> Preaching, except for Fast Days or some special occasion when a particular theme suggested itself, was usually what was termed an "ordinary". That is a passage or book of Scripture, which formed the basis of a series of expository sermons over a number of weeks, where the minister would expound the themes which occurred to him. The Rev. John Livingstone, recalling Edward Brice, described him as:

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<sup>14</sup>. W.D.Bailie Presbyterian Worship p9

“One who, in all his preaching, insisted most upon the life of Christ in the heart, and light of his Word and Spirit in the mind, that being his own continual exercise.”<sup>15</sup>

Behind the weekly routine of services Brice would have been aware of the Book of Common Order from Scotland, or the Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican tradition, but not felt beholden to either. While, like his fellow Presbyterian ministers in Ulster he would have been very much aware of the Scots tradition he would have acted according to his best judgement, and not been perturbed by variations of detail between various ministers and parishes.

Central to the sacramental life of the church was the celebration of communion which would have taken place in each parish between two and four times each year. As Brice was personally responsible for the restoration of the old church in Ballycarry we may be sure that there was no altar and that on sacrament days the communicants were seated at a table in the body of the church. By comparison with what we know of practice in the context of the Six Mile Water Revival we may assume that there were services of Preparation before, and of Thanksgiving after the Sacrament day itself. It is also highly probable that like minded neighbouring ministers and their congregations came together on these occasions to assist and support one another.

It was a matter of Scots Presbyterian practice that Baptism was to be performed in the face of the congregation. Before the church was available in Ballycarry it is probable that Brice would have baptised children, in the course of an act of worship, in some part or other of the parish. Afterwards,

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<sup>15</sup>. Life of John Livingstone: Memorable Characteristics in Scottish Puritans Select Biographies Ed. W.K.Tweddle Banner of Truth 2008 p329

baptisms would be integrated into Sunday services in the church, as indeed were marriages.

Then, as since, visiting would have had a central place in the work of the minister. That is, visiting individual families in their homes, or groups of families gathered together for the purpose, holding conversation with them, sharing aspects of Christian faith, reading Scripture, and offering prayer, all present devoutly kneeling. Where there was sickness the minister would attend to console the dying and to comfort the bereaved, but after death would not conduct a funeral service in the modern manner. Indeed the minister would frequently not be present when the deceased was removed to the graveyard for burial. To the minds of Edward Brice and others like him, any service at the graveside would have been too strongly reminiscent of the hated ceremonies of the Pre-Reformation church.

One of the great challenges which confronted Brice was how he could make Christian values and virtues known and accepted in the community and how to enforce them, if need be, upon those who rejected them, or who simply fell by the wayside. The answer to this problem in Scotland would have been the Kirk Session, which was both the eyes and ears of the minister and, which functioned in a quasi judicial manner to enforce morality within their parish community. Two of the other Ulster-Scots ministers at this time, Blair of Bangor and Livingstone of Killinchy did have sessions in their congregations and while there is no direct evidence that Brice had a Session of Ruling Elders in Ballycarry it is probable that he had such a group who performed at least some of the functions of the eldership. He would not have had however the

support of the wider system of Sessions in neighbouring congregations or of Presbytery, which he would have known in Scotland and which would afterwards become the norm in Ulster. Nevertheless if some individual proved to be particularly recalcitrant, or created what appeared to be a notorious scandal in the community, Brice would have had very particular support in the person of William Edmonstone. His influence would have been sufficient to resolve most issues.

The parish for which Edward Brice was responsible was approximately five miles by five, and while the number of his parishioners was not particularly large there is little doubt that he had a lot to do. He must have spent many hours travelling on foot, or on horseback for the longer journeys. There must have been times when he felt some of this to be a burden.

In 1621 Henry Calvert (otherwise Colvert) came to Carrickfergus with an Independent Minister, James Hubbard and a small church group. While Hubbard died in 1623 and most of the group returned to England, Calvert stayed on and began to prepare to enter the ministry. On 4<sup>th</sup>. May 1629 he was ordained by Bishop Knox of Raphoe and on the following year he was presented to the Vicarage of Muckamore or Oldstone by Sir Roger Langford and was admitted there by Bishop Echlin on 17<sup>th</sup>. June 1630.<sup>16</sup> In the interval between his ordination and his settlement in a parish of his own we find Calvert acting as assistant to Edward Brice at Ballycarry. So, for approximately a year Brice had the help of the younger man, who clearly shared a similar view of theology and churchmanship.

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<sup>16</sup>. Fasti of the Irish Presbyterian Church 1613-1840 J.McConnell and S.G.McConnell PHSI

In spite of his advancing years and his work load, which must have increased as the population gradually built up, Brice still found time to assist other ministers and to take an interest in wider movements in the church. In 1625 James Glendinning, formerly Vicar at Carnmoney and Lecturer at Carrickfergus, was transferred to the parish of Muckamore or Oldstone near Antrim. Robert Blair had advised him that as a Scot he would be better suited to a country parish among his fellow countrymen. Glendinning was a popular preacher and certainly created a great upsurge in religious awareness, however his preaching only filled the people with “law, wrath, and the terrors of God for sin”,<sup>17</sup> and he was too eccentric and unsettled in his ways to bring this incipient revival to any satisfactory outcome.

The numbers involved rapidly increased and it became obvious that other ministers were needed. John Ridge, minister of Antrim, was active at an early stage, as was Josias Welsh, newly arrived at Templepatrick. They were quickly joined by Robert Blair from Bangor, Robert Cunningham from Holywood, James Hamilton from Ballywalter and, after Glendinning left in 1630 to visit the seven churches of Asia, by Henry Calvert who succeeded him at Oldstone. Others were also involved, including Edward Brice. What is notable is that the area chiefly affected was the valley of the Six Mile Water, which was being strongly settled by Scots people at this time and that the ministers involved were all either English Puritans or Scots Presbyterians. Indeed their opponents would choose to see the whole phenomenon as an undesirable by-product of their style of ministry.

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<sup>17</sup>. A Stewart op cit

For their part however they saw this as a God sent opportunity to lift up the people to deeper religious awareness and felt that they must do everything in their power to maximise this influence for good. To this end they began to hold a monthly lecture meeting at Antrim and, being together, to consult on what would be most helpful to advance this work and their ministries in general. It was their custom that on the Sunday following the Antrim Meeting the Lord's Supper would be celebrated in one of the neighbouring parishes, not as a single service, but as a series of services, Preparation on the Saturday, the Lord's Supper on the Sunday, and Thanksgiving on the Monday. Because of the sequence of services, and of the huge numbers attending, Josias Welsh refers to fourteen or fifteen hundred being present at the sacrament,<sup>18</sup> it was necessary that a number of ministers come together to help each other.

On occasion this number included Edward Brice. Robert Blair records that at some point in 1630 he was at such a communion gathering "being invited to assist Mr. Josias Welsh" presumably at Templepatrick. Blair preached on the Saturday and the afternoon of the Lord's Day and again, although he had not expected to do so, in the evening. On the Monday the crowds gathered early and took away Mr. Welsh to preach outside the castle, leaving Blair to preach in the church without preparation, having hoped that another would do so. Although anxious and somewhat troubled he conducted himself effectively and finishing tried to slip away quickly. As he did so a voice called after him "of a truth the Lord was with you". Seeing that it was "that ancient minister, Mr. Bryce of

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<sup>18</sup>. The Six Mile Water Revival of 1625 W.D.Bailie PHSI 1984 p14

Broadisland (who had been earnestly invited to preach at that diet, but obstinately refused)” Blair “turning cried to him Sir, God forgive your backdrawing.”<sup>19</sup> Doubtless Blair was exhausted by his efforts and less than pleased at having to speak unprepared, but it must have been the case that Brice also felt worn out, having almost certainly assisted at some of the services on the Sunday and, feeling incapable of preaching again to good effect on the Monday, had declined that request.

The significant thing however is that Brice was there. That he had travelled to Antrim and Templepatrick, shared in the services, and taken part in the upsurge of Christian faith and enthusiasm. He knew as well as any how widely this was spreading up the Six Mile Water valley and across East Antrim, reaching as far as Larne, and Ballycarry.

He was also aware that, as often happens in revival situations, the spiritual awakening was sometimes also marked by physical and emotional excesses which left participants prostrate and incoherent. Writing of this, Andrew Stewart recalled :

“I have seen them myself stricken, and swoon with the word; Yea a dozen in one day carried out of doors as dead.”<sup>20</sup>

Something similar was experienced at Ballycarry , where John Livingstone recalled :

“There were indeed in some parishes, especially in Bread Island [sic] . . . some people who used in time of sermons to fall upon a high breathing and panting, as do those who have run long.”<sup>21</sup>

Stewart attributed these effects to the power of God touching the hearts of those involved, but Livingstone took a

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<sup>19</sup>. Robert Blair op cit p.135

<sup>20</sup>. A.Stewart op cit p317

<sup>21</sup>. J.Livingstone Life op cit p146



different view, "Most of the ministers . . . discountenanced these practices and suspected them not to proceed from any work of the Spirit of God"<sup>22</sup> Many of the ministers concerned did indeed begin to be anxious, fearing lest their opponents might use such events as grounds to proceed against them. In the absence of any further references we may assume that after a time in Ballycarry the heat of spiritual emotion subsided.

The events of the Six Mile Water Revival in the late 1620s took place against a changing background of national politics and ecclesiastical outlook. The situation of 1613 when Bishops were pleased to receive additional clergy, albeit of a Presbyterian outlook and were largely unconcerned about the activities of Scots settlers in rural Ulster parishes, had changed to be replaced by a situation where there was a growing body of Scots Presbyterian ministers, functioning almost as a church within a church and where their activities could not fail to be noticed.

This was also part of a wider issue relating to Church order and discipline. In England the Anglican hierarchy was asserting its rights and by enforcement of the canons was trying to ensure that puritan influences were restricted, so that the Book of Common Prayer would be followed and church furniture and clergy vestments closely regulated. In Scotland the role of Bishops had been steadily expanded and shortly an effort would be made to introduce a service book, with dramatic consequences. It was only a matter of time until the impetus of the same policies would have an effect in Ireland.

There was also a theological dimension to this. Around the year 1600 the reformed churches of the three kingdoms, that

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p146

is the churches of England, Scotland and Ireland had been strongly Calvinist in theology. The Scots church was immersed in this theology. The Church of England strongly sympathetic and the Church of Ireland, notably in its 105 Articles of 1615, also took a clear Calvinist stance. However this position began to change. The most prominent figure in this was William Laud, Bishop of London from 1628 and Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633, who advocated Arminian theology and by careful preferment and patronage advanced others of the same views. This influence also came to be felt in Ireland, leaving only Scotland as the main bastion of Calvinist views. Given this, to the mind of Laud and his supporters the very word Presbyterian was a cause for concern and a further reason to distrust and disempower the Scots in Ulster. In the coming time he would use his considerable influence to respond to any complaint made against them.

Aspects of the Six Mile Water Revival gave opportunity for such complaints. Henry Leslie, the Dean of Down, gave this rather colourful description of events connected with the revival in 1631 :

“The people in that place are grown into such frenzies that the like is not to be found among Anabaptists, for there is set abroad a new piece of divinity that no man can be counted converted unless he feel the pains of his new birth such as St. Paul felt. So that every sermon, forty or so people, for the most part women, fall down in the church in a trance, and are (as it is supposed) senseless, but in their fits they are grievously afflicted with convulsions, tremblings and unnatural motions.”<sup>23</sup>

Leslie implied that Bishop Echlin was too weak to suppress

<sup>23</sup> Calendar of State Papers Ireland (1625-30) p 629

this activity and certainly Echlin tended to play it down. To do otherwise would have implied that he was not in control of his diocese. It was as though Echlin knew that this would soon become a major issue, but tried to justify his reluctance to act by saying "I hoped to reform them."<sup>24</sup> It was clear however by 1630-31 that Echlin was increasingly cool towards these Scots Presbyterian ministers and felt that he could not easily overlook any further complaints received.

In June of 1630 Robert Blair was on a visit to Scotland and met John Livingstone, shortly to become minister of Killinchy. Together they assisted at the Lord's Supper at Kirk of Shotts and so became connected with the Shotts revival. This did not pass unnoticed. James Law, Bishop of Glasgow and John Maxwell, afterwards Bishop of Ross, alleged that they were exciting the people to ecstasies, and forwarded their charges to Dean Leslie. Leslie endorsed them and forwarded the complaints to Bishop Echlin, who now felt that he could hold back no longer. In September 1631 Echlin suspended Blair, Livingstone, Dunbar and Welsh from the exercise of their ministry.

By way of response, Robert Blair now appealed to Archbishop Ussher, who had undoubted puritan sympathies, to whom he had previously been introduced and through his influence these suspensions were lifted. Within months however the position was reversed once more. This time John Maxwell went to London and brought charges to the King's attention, alleging enthusiasm, turbulence and disobedience to ecclesiastical authority against the Scottish ministers in Ulster, and naming in particular Blair, Livingstone, Dunbar and

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<sup>24</sup>. Ibid. pp661-62

Welsh.<sup>25</sup> King Charles now sent a letter to the Lords Justices in Dublin, who in turn wrote to Bishop Echlin. Blair, Livingstone, Dunbar and Welsh were accordingly suspended once more in May 1632.

Robert Blair once again approached Archbishop Ussher, only to be told that the matter was out of his hands, and that the only possible recourse would be to the King himself. So, with the help of Livingstone, Blair obtained letters of introduction, went to London, and obtained an interview with the King. After hearing him the King agreed to alter his instructions and provided a new letter to be passed to Sir Thomas Wentworth. In January 1632 Wentworth had been appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland and while it was widely known that he was a friend and ally of Bishop Laud, Blair assumed that the King's letter would supersede any other views. Nevertheless he still had to wait until July 1633 because only then did Wentworth actually take up office in Ireland, and Blair could travel to Dublin to present the letter to him. His hopes were quickly quashed as Wentworth refused to countenance the letter, declaring that he had the King's mind in his own heart.

What Wentworth would not do for the church, he was prepared to do for political advantage. In 1634 it was necessary to call the Parliament in Dublin and hoping to secure the support of some members and noblemen from Ulster, Wentworth wrote to Echlin in May of that year, asking for the suspensions to be withdrawn for six months. This was done, but at the end of the six month period the situation was reversed yet again and Echlin now proceeded, in November 1634 to

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<sup>25</sup> J.S.Reid op cit p138

depose Blair and Dunbar from office. Josias Welsh was spared such a sentence, having died on 23<sup>rd</sup>. June 1634 and John Livingstone was given another year's grace, being finally deposed in November 1635.

When things had come to such a pass it was clear to all that the process would not end while there were Presbyterian minded ministers remaining in Ulster parishes. On 17<sup>th</sup>. July 1635 Robert Echlin died, and was succeeded as Bishop of Down and Connor on 4<sup>th</sup>. November of that year by Henry Leslie, whose views were already well known. In July 1636 Leslie held an Episcopal Visitation of his dioceses at Lisburn and made it known that subscription to the canons of the Church of Ireland would be required of all clergy. Five of their number refused, namely Ridge of Antrim, Cunningham of Holywood, Hamilton of Ballywalter, Calvert of Oldstone and Brice of Ballycarry. After a private discussion with these men Bishop Leslie summoned them to meet with him once more in the church of Belfast on 10<sup>th</sup>. August.

This conference in Belfast did not begin in an auspicious manner for the Presbyterians as the first session was given over to a sermon by the Bishop on the text "But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" Matthew Ch.18 V.17 The substance may be indicated by the title of the published version "A Treatise of the Authority of the Church"<sup>26</sup>

At some considerable length Leslie berated the Presbyterians for their customs and principles and for their failure to endorse the Articles and Canons of the Church of Ireland. Nevertheless, the Bishop made an offer to debate these

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<sup>26</sup>. Ibid. p190

matters openly with them in the church on the following day. This offer the Presbyterians readily accepted and appointed James Hamilton to speak on their behalf. So, in the presence of a large audience, the morning of Thursday 11<sup>th</sup>. August was given over to a detailed and intricate debate, steadfastly maintained on both sides. However, after an interjection by Bishop Bramhall, Leslie adjourned the debate first to the afternoon and then to the next morning.

On Friday 12<sup>th</sup>. August the various parties assembled once more. Bishop Leslie engaged in some discussion with John Ridge, James Hamilton and Robert Cunningham, but it was clear that he was no longer open to debate but wished only to pass sentence on each of the recalcitrant clergy. So each in turn, Ridge, Hamilton, Cunningham, Calvert and Brice were deposed from their parishes.

The previous few years had been a period of great activity and public challenges for the Presbyterian ministers in Ulster, yet it is not easy to identify the role in all of this played by Edward Brice. In most of the public encounters he played little or no obvious part. Only in the summer of 1636 was he formally noticed by the Bishop. In the earlier years Bishop Echlin knew him perfectly well. He had served in Ballycarry for over twenty years. He was known to be a Scot of clear Presbyterian views and to be the friend and colleague of others who held similar views. Since he was senior among their party it would have been logical to have made an example of him first of all.

That this did not take place is almost certainly because Brice had a much lower public profile than the others. The key to understanding this may be in a phrase on his tombstone which

describes his ministry in Ballycarry as “continuing with quiet success”. He was not given to controversy. He was not a spokesman for the others, indeed even on the day of his deposition, when the discussions were fairly well recorded, there is no indication that he even attempted to speak. Nor did he seem to be far travelled, for there is no record of him even going back to Scotland. It is more than probable that his main activity was, by choice, within his own parish.

Brice was of course aware by the late 1620s that official policy would no longer turn a blind eye to Presbyterians such as himself. It is curious that in 1628 Brice was replaced as Prebendary of Kilroot,<sup>27</sup> a post which he had held since 1619. There is no indication of his being formally removed or deposed, so we must assume that he willingly resigned the post. Perhaps he had come to feel that such an office bound him too closely to the Episcopal hierarchy, or meant that he might be summoned to the Bishop’s presence more often than he might wish. In either case he was able to sidestep the issue by pleading his age. John Livingstone, who only knew Brice in the years after 1630 described him as “an aged man that came not much abroad”<sup>28</sup> We have already noted Blair’s reference to him as “that ancient minister”. It could well be that the passing years and perhaps incipient health issues combined to restrict his activities, and keep him within his own beloved parish.

Edward Brice returned to Ballycarry on 12<sup>th</sup>. August 1636. He had still the support of his parishioners, and he still had the support of the Edmonstone family, although here things had changed. Sir William, his patron of the early years, died in

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<sup>27</sup>. J.B.Leslie op cit p48

<sup>28</sup>. J.Livingstone Memorable Characteristics op cit p329

1626, to be succeeded by his son Archibald, who in turn died on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1636, only a few months after Brice himself. The family were to remain in Redhall for the next 148 years and to continue, as before, stalwart supporters of the Presbyterian interest. In spite of such local support however, Brice knew that now church and state were united against him. The Bishop could decide who would be permitted to preach in the parish church of Ballycarry and ultimately the civil authorities would support the Bishop. Neither Archibald Edmonstone nor the people of Ballycarry could stand against this.

The afflictions of age, anxiety and grief combined to lay Brice low, but before any steps could be taken to enforce the Bishop's edict, the matter was resolved by higher authority, as he died within a few weeks. He was buried within the walls of his church, but exactly where is uncertain, as is the precise date of his death, because the headstone was only erected in, or shortly after 1697. It commemorates, in addition to the minister, his son Robert who prospered as a merchant at Castle Chichester and his grandson Randal, who sat in the Dublin parliament as member for Lisburn. The headstone was inserted into a side wall, at a spot which was probably the former location of a window, with an inscription which begins "Neare this lyeth the body of". It is tempting to wonder if he was buried in front of the pulpit.



## The Legacy of Edward Brice

His headstone calls him “That faithful and eminent servant of God”, but then every minister fondly hopes that later generations will count them faithful, and more to the point, that the same view will also be taken in higher quarters. Nevertheless it is not disrespectful to say of Brice that he was not eminent, certainly not in comparison with Blair or Livingstone, who both had distinguished careers with a significant public profile. Yet, there are other ways of being eminent.

When Brice came to Ireland he was taking a step into the unknown. He had heard that Scots people were going there and beginning to settle in some numbers, but it was a place apart, across the sea. It was a place with a frightening reputation which would deter many from going, and which would continue to haunt those who did go to live there, certainly as we have seen, to 1622 and beyond. To take the decision to live in Broadisland or Ballycarry in 1613 was not an easy option.

Brice did know that he had an invitation. That is, that he was promised a nomination to be minister of the parish, but there lingered an uncertainty as to whether the church authorities would accept him and whether perhaps an ill report of him had already been forwarded from Scotland. There would also have been a doubt in his mind as to whether he would want to serve in the church in Ireland. Could he bring himself to do business with a Bishop and, if so, upon what terms? As he made the sea crossing from Scotland he must have had more questions than answers.

There was of course only one way to answer these and other

questions and that was to make the journey. This he did and doing so, he proved to himself and to others that it could be done.

It was not easy trying to create a working church community of normative Christians in a frontier settlement. It was a challenge which occupied Brice for all of his ministry there. From open air services and going house to house, gradually getting to know and encourage his people, to the major project of the repair and renovation of the church. Once again Brice proved it could be done and so was an example to other ministers in similar situations, many of whom also entered into parishes with ruined churches and no active body of worshipper. They too established working congregations and a strong Christian core in their communities.

It was not easy to establish a working relationship with an Episcopal church for Presbyterians like Brice who, from their experiences in Scotland, had developed an intense dislike of everything to do with Bishops. They were extremely wary of the ceremonies and procedures associated with an Episcopal church, and feared the influence of London and Canterbury. Yet Brice learned that the Church of Ireland, as an organisation, was often remote from him. He understood that he was serving a Scots community, which thought of the church in terms of what they had known back in Scotland, ten or even twenty years before. He also drew assurance from the fact that he was beholden to a landlord, who was himself a Scot and who was an active and wiling supporter of the church. Who provided the minister's accommodation and probably his salary, and who certainly provided much of the money and resources for the rebuilding of the church. Given such a local foundation Brice

could feel secure and confident in his daily work. The same applied to most of the other Scots ministers who, like him, shared similar parishes and situations.

It also became clear that the Bishops were initially only too glad to have an increased supply of ministers and saw no reason to press them about ceremonies or church procedures. Certainly until the late 1620s Echlin was more than willing to receive such Scots Presbyterians, and his Episcopal colleague Andrew Knox perfectly amenable to those who came to him seeking ordination. Brice learned, before the others, that being a Rector and even a Prebendary, did not necessarily interfere with his practice of Presbyterian principles. That information he passed on and the example was surely an encouragement to the others.

Ministers of every church and generation seek out the fellowship of other like minded ministers. Whether through a modern clergy fraternal, or just by knowing that you have friends and colleagues with whom you are happy to swap pulpits. Or, as in Brice's time, at the Six Mile Water Revival to assist each other at the Communion Season. Brice was the first, with whom other like minded ministers could connect. His presence in Ulster gave a reassurance that other ministers like himself would not be alone, that they could share with and support each other. They would come to understand, that in working with one another, amongst their own community, they could create what was almost a church within a church, a Presbyterian church on a model familiar and acceptable to them.

The sentence passed on Brice, together with the others, in August 1636, was that of Deposition. This was amongst the

most severe of penalties to be handed down by a church court, generally reserved for the most serious offenders and cases which often included some gross moral lapse, or flagrant neglect of duties. The only attempt to stain Edward Brice's moral character had been made in Scotland, some twenty-three years before and had been ignored ever since by all who knew and respected him. It seems never to have been referred to in Ireland. Nor were similar charges brought against any of his deposed colleagues in Ulster. Indeed Bishop Leslie said of Robert Cunningham

“Mr. Cunningham I confess your life and doctrine hath both been good”<sup>29</sup>

Nor does any suggestion appear to have been made that any of these ministers were lax or neglectful of their parish duties. The only issue formally cited against them was their refusal to subscribe the canons of the Church of Ireland.

It is plain therefore that these men were not deposed for being bad ministers as such, rather, that by refusing to accept the Canons they had demonstrated that they were not, and never would be, good ministers of the Church of Ireland as to her laws and ceremonies.

Instead of this, the church which they were striving to establish and maintain in their own parishes was a version of the Church of Scotland. Not perhaps the Church of Scotland as officially recognised by the King and government in the 1630s, but as they had remembered it, or looked back to it, a generation before, that is an overtly Presbyterian Church.

Although deposed from their parishes in Ulster, these ministers had laid foundations which could not be removed. When the ministers of the Army Presbytery began to preach in

neighbouring parishes in 1642 the congregations of such places as Ballycarry were among the first to hear them. It should be noted clearly that these army chaplains were not missionaries, but rather that they were coming to existing communities, with a recently established church tradition, in the Presbyterian manner. When Licentiates were brought from Scotland to fill Ulster pulpits in 1646 the same congregations were amongst the first to have ministers ordained. In Ballycarry in that year Robert Cunningham, the son of Brice's former colleague Robert Cunningham of Holywood, was ordained to fill the pulpit vacant since 1636.

These foundations were more than theoretical, for they were deeply embedded in the minds of the people of those communities. A desire for the church and for Christian faith and practice in Presbyterian form.

In such ways Edward Brice laid foundations that are shared by the three churches of Ballycarry, at the heart of his former parish.

Edward Brice also, being the first of that exceptional group, laid the foundations of Presbyterianism in Ireland which, in its several forms, still bears witness to that form of worship which they knew and loved.

## Bibliography

In compiling such an article as this the bibliography could be very extensive, touching on many aspects of the early seventeenth century in the three kingdoms, nevertheless the present writer feels that in addition to the works cited in the footnotes, the following publications could be consulted as an introduction to Presbyterian church history and its origins in Ireland:

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