

Cockle Row Cottages

- survivors of the redevelopment of Goomsport



Cockle Row Cottages in the 1950s



Cockle Row

Photograph by Perry Moore, 2016

Cockle Row cottages are some of the oldest buildings in the village are also probably the best known buildings in the village. They are believed to have been built in the 17th century as fishermen's cottages. They were built at right angles to the sea to protect from the chilling north wind.

John and Peg Barrons were the last residents of the cottage with the thatched roof. They moved to a new house on Main Street in the early 1960s. Miss Orr was the last resident of the other cottage.

The cottages were threatened during the redevelopment of the village in the 1960s. Rev Dr David Irwin, then the minister of Goomsport Presbyterian Church, and his wife

Maureen, stood in front of the bulldozer that had been sent to demolish the cottages. They persuaded the foreman to desist and won time for reconsideration, after which the demolition was called off.

The Bangor Art Club used the cottages for some years. In the late 1990s, the Council used EU funding to refurbish the cottages. Since then one cottage has been used as a Tourist Information Office while the other has become a small heritage centre, reflecting the history of the cottages and the village.

The redevelopment of Groomsport in the 1960s

In the 18th and 19th centuries and the start of the 20th century, Groomsport was a thriving fishing village. At one point it is estimated that there were as many as 20 boats and 80 fishermen based in the harbour. As a result, a number of small cottages were built around the harbour and along Main Street for the fishermen and their families. Latterly, fishermen also occupied the cottages on The Point which had originally been built for the crew of the Coastguard station, which had closed about 1908.

The cottages, many of which were thatched, were very attractive, as the following photograph of Main Street, taken in 1944, shows.



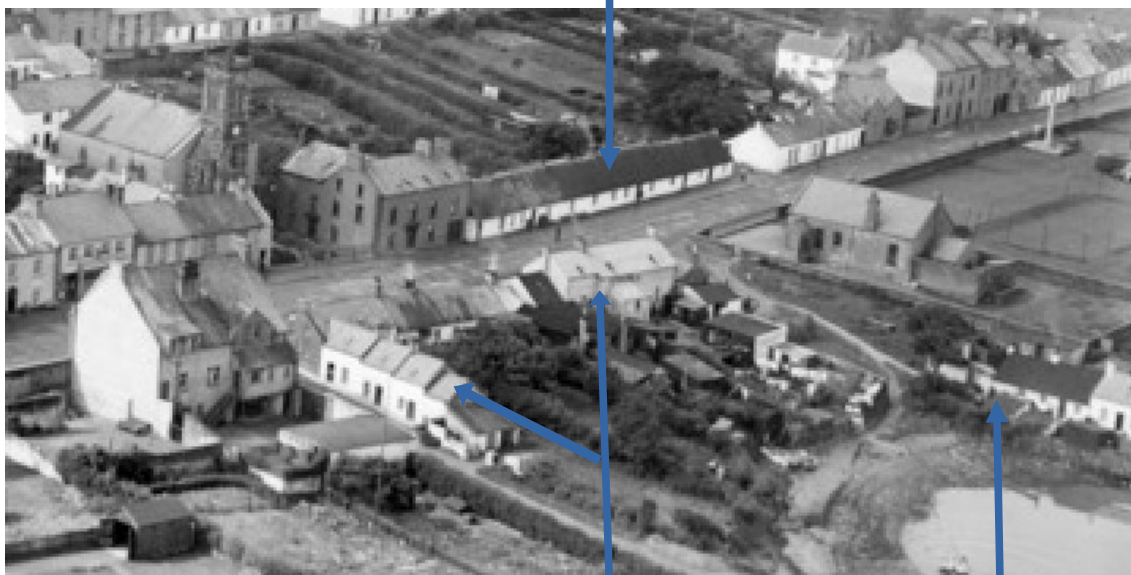
Main Street, 1944

Photograph taken by Sgt John S Blankenhorn of 166th Signal Photography Company, US Army

By the 1960s these cottages were no longer seen as meeting modern housing standards and it was believed that they contributed to poor health – many had no running water or electricity. It was decided that they should be demolished and replaced.

The following portion of an aerial photograph, taken in 1929, shows the cottages in the centre of the village. The annotations note what replaced them.

Replaced by modern social housing on Main Street and The Hill



www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/XPW028694

Copyright: Historic England

Replaced by open space in front of the harbour

Cockle Row Cottages (retained)

The demolition of the cottages on Main Street, pictured in the photograph taken in 1944, provided the village with an attractive open space, in the centre of the village and running down to the harbour, which is greatly appreciated by residents and visitors. The cottages at Cockle Row enhance the view.

The old Coastguard cottages were also demolished in the 1960s. Therefore, if Cockle Row had not been saved, Groomsport would have lost all of the old cottages that were an important part of its history.

Peter Gibson
January 2023

Sources:

“Tides and Times at the Port” by Rev Dr David Irwin
“A History of Groomsport” North Down Tourism