

Northern Ireland - The CS Lewis Story

Unlock your Imagination



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Northern Ireland
Tourist Board



European Union





*Gas lamp-posts in the middle of Crawfordsburn
Country Park and the grounds of Campbell College
may have inspired the Narnian Lamp-post.*

'Make your choice adventurous stranger...'



With the release of the Walt Disney and Walden Media feature film 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' in December 2005, Northern Ireland has the opportunity to pay homage to one of its greatest literary figures, Clive Staples Lewis. Lewis' childhood in Belfast and regular holiday visits acquainted him with sights and sounds which he would later develop into the magical world of Narnia.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and our partners, Belfast City Council and Queen's University Belfast, recognise the importance of Lewis' 'Northernness' and how the inspirational landscape of the Mourne, and the magical setting of Dunluce Castle stirred his imagination. As Lewis himself once said:

'The call of the roads is upon me, a desire in my spirit has grown, to wander forth in the highways and seek for the lands no foot has trod ...'

'Make your choice adventurous stranger...' are the words which tempted Digory Kirke in 'The Magician's Nephew', the opening book to the Chronicles of Narnia. So why not make your choice and allow us to guide you in the footsteps of Lewis, and discover Northern Ireland for yourself.

An Introduction to CS Lewis

*'I'm Irish
not English*

Did you ever know an Irishman who didn't puff and blow? This was CS Lewis' playful response, in 1958, on being informed that his heavy breathing was playing havoc with the delicate sound balance during a recording session for a radio production due to be broadcast in America. The fact he needed to clarify his origins at a time when he was well known as a writer on both sides of the Atlantic, gives some indication of how his formative childhood years in Belfast have tended to be overlooked.

Lewis has, until relatively recently, been considered a writer firmly within the grand tradition of English Literature. This perception arose partly through his close association with both Oxford and Cambridge universities and partly that, his published works display little trace of, or deal directly with, his Irish influences and background.

Readers throughout the world have no difficulty in identifying CS Lewis as the author who created

the imaginary world of Narnia, which began in 1950 with 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' and ended in 1956 with 'The Last Battle,' now collectively known as 'The Chronicles of Narnia.'

But Lewis also had a formidable reputation as an Oxford don, Christian apologist, broadcaster, and literary critic, and to a lesser extent, as a poet, science-fiction writer, and man of letters with over 40 books and numerous articles to his credit.

CS Lewis' popularity has continued to grow world-wide and shows no sign of waning: his work has been translated into more than 20 languages, including Welsh, Chinese, Icelandic and even Hawaiian.

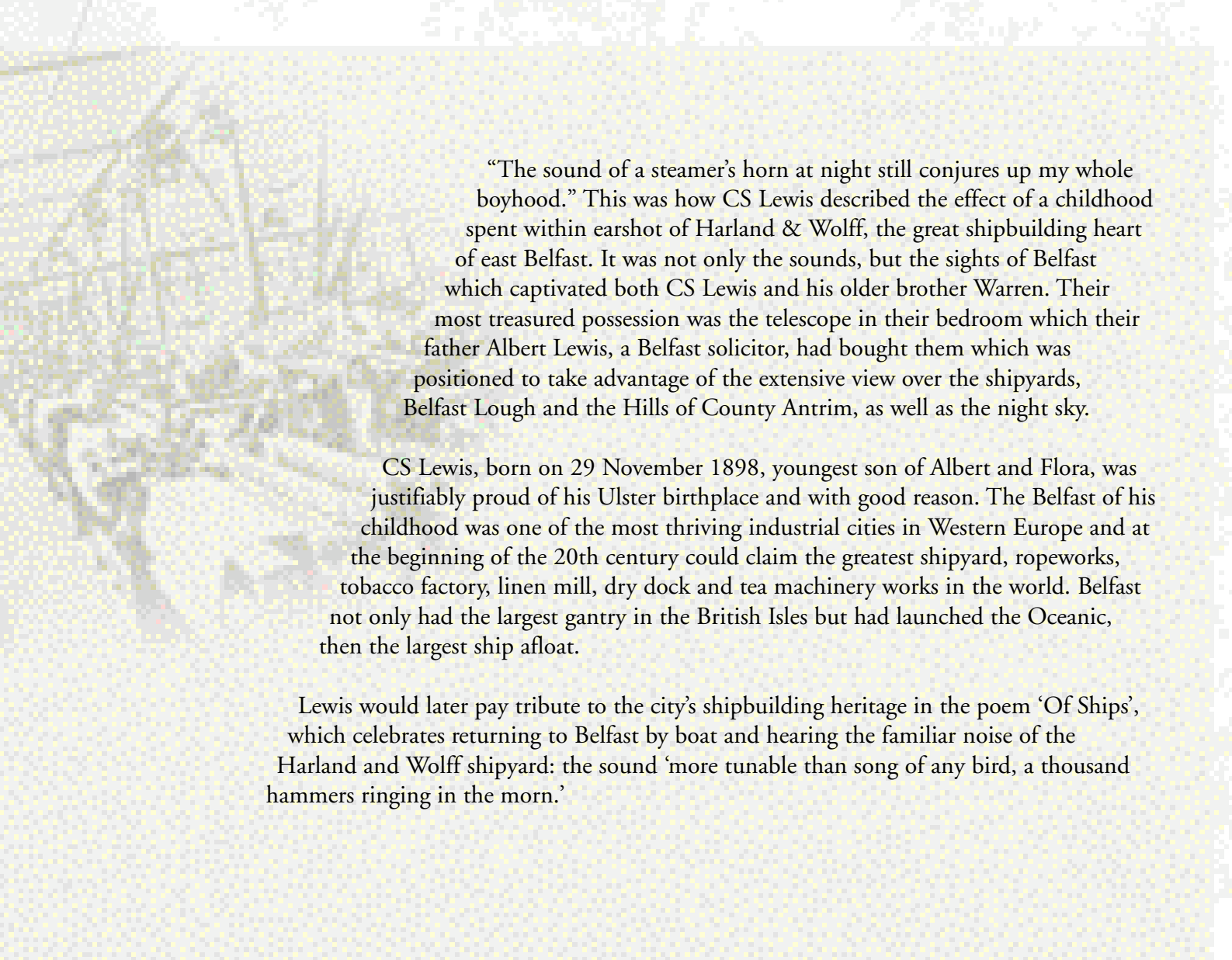
Now with the Disney film adaptation of 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' a new generation of children (and adults) will be introduced to the visionary world of CS Lewis.

Study of CS Lewis by Ross Wilson

A Belfast Childhood

Growing up in a city rich in maritime and industrial history was one of CS Lewis' proudest childhood memories. The sights and sounds of the city which built the biggest and best known ships in the world, the Oceanic and Titanic, embedded itself in his imagination. Lewis loved what was known as the 'Belfast Symphony': the continual throb and stammer of the great shipyards.

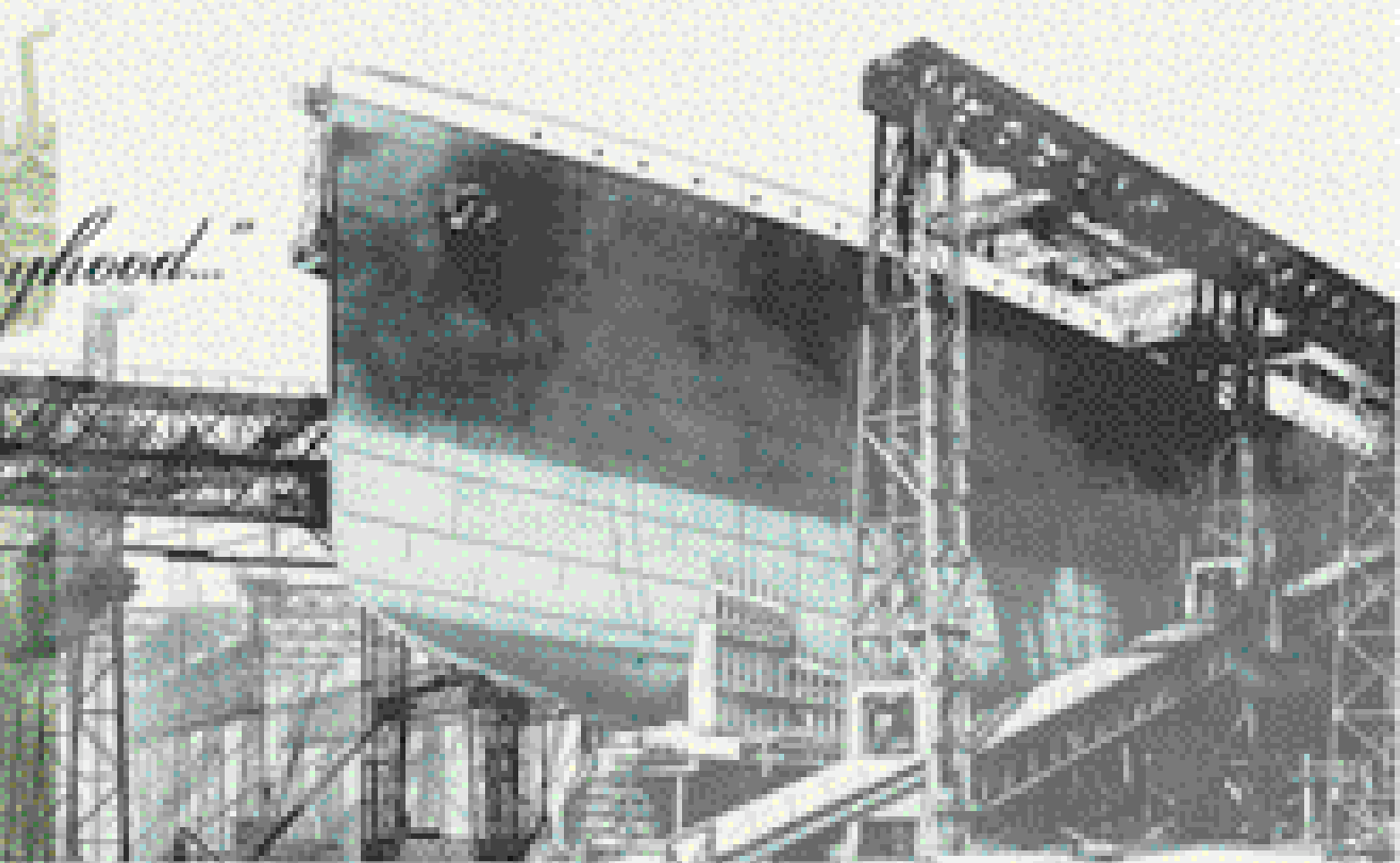
*The sound of a steamer's horn
at night still conjures up my whole life*



“The sound of a steamer’s horn at night still conjures up my whole boyhood.” This was how CS Lewis described the effect of a childhood spent within earshot of Harland & Wolff, the great shipbuilding heart of east Belfast. It was not only the sounds, but the sights of Belfast which captivated both CS Lewis and his older brother Warren. Their most treasured possession was the telescope in their bedroom which their father Albert Lewis, a Belfast solicitor, had bought them which was positioned to take advantage of the extensive view over the shipyards, Belfast Lough and the Hills of County Antrim, as well as the night sky.

CS Lewis, born on 29 November 1898, youngest son of Albert and Flora, was justifiably proud of his Ulster birthplace and with good reason. The Belfast of his childhood was one of the most thriving industrial cities in Western Europe and at the beginning of the 20th century could claim the greatest shipyard, ropeworks, tobacco factory, linen mill, dry dock and tea machinery works in the world. Belfast not only had the largest gantry in the British Isles but had launched the *Oceanic*, then the largest ship afloat.

Lewis would later pay tribute to the city’s shipbuilding heritage in the poem ‘Of Ships’, which celebrates returning to Belfast by boat and hearing the familiar noise of the Harland and Wolff shipyard: the sound ‘more tunable than song of any bird, a thousand hammers ringing in the morn.’





'The Searcher.' Sculpted by Ross Wilson



Key CS Lewis sites in Belfast

Like the landscapes of Narnia, the streets of CS Lewis' beloved Belfast can lead to places which surprise and delight. Whether exploring the established cultural landmarks of the Queen's and Cathedral Quarters or looking forward to the exciting development of the Titanic Quarter, visitors can discover the locations and landscapes that shaped and inspired CS Lewis' love affair with Belfast.



St. Mark's Church



Belmont Tower



Opening times vary. Please check venue before you visit.

Belmont Tower
82 Belmont Church Road
Belfast, BT4 3FG
suzannebelmont@msn.com
Tel: 028 9065 3338

Located in East Belfast, at the corner of Belmont Church Road and Belmont Road, this Gothic styled, late Victorian listed building has been beautifully restored in recent times. It is home to a small exhibition about CS Lewis, and a great location in which to enjoy a leisurely coffee in the heart of Lewis' birthplace. Please contact the venue prior to your visit for exhibition opening times.

'The Searcher' sculpture - Holywood Road Library
Hollywood Arches
4-12 Holywood Road
Belfast, BT4 1NT
www.ni-libraries.net

The CS Lewis centenary sculpture by Northern Irish artist Ross Wilson is an inspired creation based on the character of Digory Kirke who, in 'The Magician's Nephew,' features a wardrobe made from a beautiful apple tree which has special properties. It is through this magical wardrobe that the Pevensie children, Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy, enter Narnia and meet the talking animals and mythological creatures that populate that snowbound world. Modelled on CS Lewis as he was in 1919, the sculpture seeks, in the words of the artist, to capture the "great ideas of sacrifice, redemption, victory, and freedom for the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve" that lie at the heart of the 'Chronicles of Narnia.'

St. Mark's Church, (Church of Ireland) Dundela
Hollywood Road, Belfast, BT4 2DH
www.dundela.down.anglican.org
Tel: 028 9065 4090

Born on 29 November 1898, this was CS Lewis' local church in which he was baptised on 29 January 1899 and confirmed on 6 December 1914. There is a stained glass window in the church, donated by the Lewis brothers in memory of their parents, which was designed by the Irish artist Michael Healy.



RAILWAY

R-8 ROAD

SYDENHAM RIVER

RAILWAY

SYDENHAM

5

4

BELMONT

6

3

2

8

7

LYMACARRETT

HERTOWNMORE

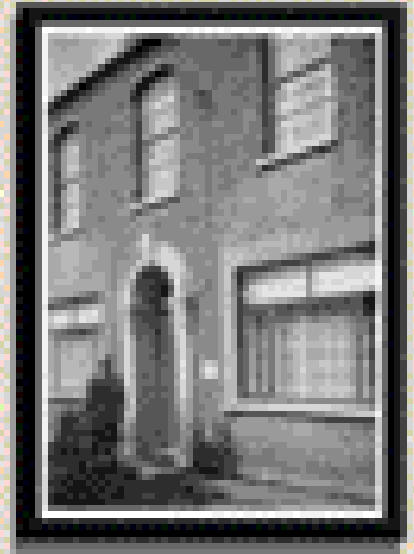
BLOOMFIELD

BALLYHACKANORE

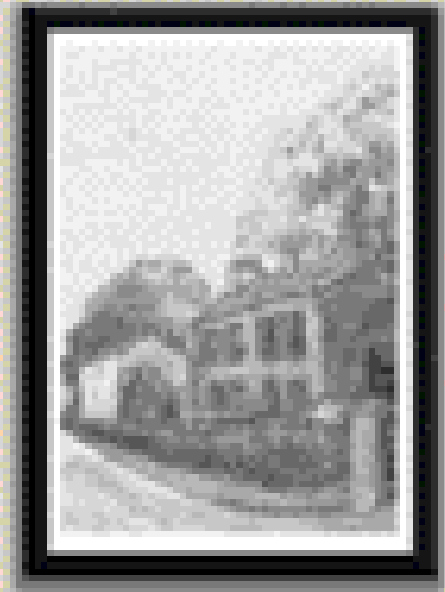


Ty-Isa**Parkgate Avenue, Belfast**

Ty-Isa (Welsh for 'the house alone') was the home of CS Lewis' paternal grandfather, Richard Lewis, from 1870 until the death of his wife Martha in 1903. Following the death of his wife, Richard divided his time by staying with each of his sons until finally settling at Little Lea in 1907. Ty-Isa is now a private residence.

**Dundela Villas****Dundela Villas (now demolished)**

Dundela Flats now occupy the site of what was once Albert and Flora Lewis' Belfast home 'Dundela Villas'. The pair of semi-detached houses were attached to an old coach house. The couple moved here following their marriage in 1894 and saw both their sons born here. The houses were demolished in 1952. A blue plaque can be seen on the side of Dundela Flats.

**Little Lea****Circular Road, Belfast**

Little Lea was the Lewis family home from 1905 until 1930. To the young CS Lewis, Little Lea 'seemed less like a house than a city' and it was here that his first stories were written and illustrated with 'enormous satisfaction.' CS Lewis found an eager audience for his work in the family literary magazine called 'The Leeborough Review' which was compiled for their own amusement.

Please respect the privacy of the owners of private residences.

The family on the steps of Little Lea
 Front row (L-R) Warren, Clive Staples, Leonard and Eileen Lewis (cousins)
 Back Row (L-R) Agnes Lewis (aunt), two maids (unidentified), Flora Lewis (mother)
 Albert Lewis (father with the family dog- Nero)



Queen's University of Belfast
University Road, Belfast
BT7 1NN
www.qub.ac.uk

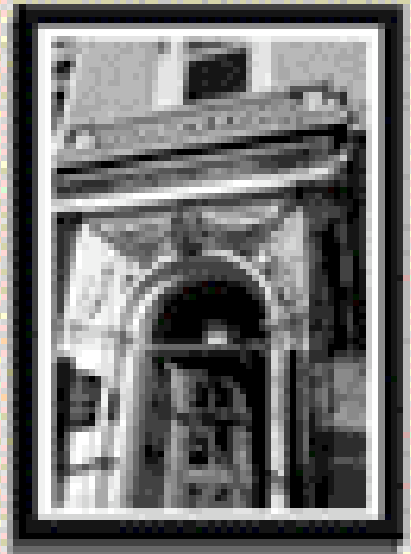
CS Lewis' mother, Flora Lewis, was a brilliant student who attended The Queen's University of Belfast (then The Royal University of Ireland) where she studied Geometry, Algebra, Logic and Mathematics before receiving her BA in 1886. Whilst studying at Queen's she also attended Ladies' Classes in nearby Methodist College from 1881 to 1885. CS Lewis discussed with his brother the possibility of finding employment at Queen's and mused on keeping their home in Oxford as a holiday destination.



Linen Hall Library
17 Donegall Square North,
Belfast, BT1 5GB
www.linenhall.com

The Linen Hall Library is home to a unique collection of books by and about CS Lewis. The collection, donated by the CS Lewis Association of Ireland, is a first for Northern Ireland and is a fitting tribute to one of Belfast's most famous literary figures. Originally founded in 1788 as The Belfast Reading Society, in 1801 it was established as the Belfast Library and Society for Promoting Knowledge in the city's Linen Hall. Not only is it Belfast's oldest library, but it is also the last subscribing library in Ireland.

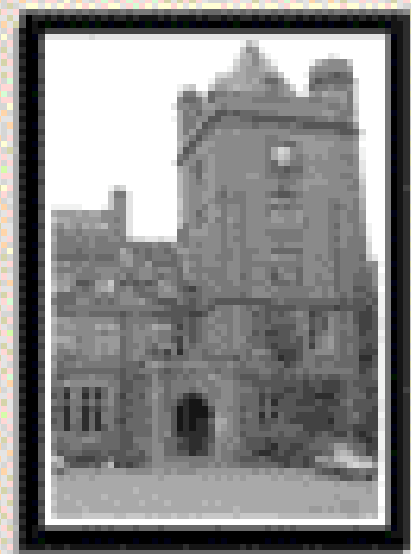
Linen Hall Library



Campbell College
Belmont Road, Belfast, BT4 2ND
www.campbellcollege.co.uk

Campbell College was founded, according to Lewis, 'for the express purpose of giving Ulster boys all the advantages of a public school education without the trouble of crossing the Irish Sea.' Lewis boarded here for half a term in the autumn of 1910 and, among the chief impressions of his time there, were fond memories of his influential English master, Lewis Alden. Halfway through the term, he fell ill, and was withdrawn from the school.

Campbell College



Please contact Campbell College prior to visiting.

Slieve Binnian, County Down
looking west to Annalong Valley



Inspirational Landscapes

CS Lewis loved the dramatic and rugged landscapes of Northern Ireland. From the mountains of County Down to the romantic ruins of Dunluce Castle in County Antrim, the land inspired him to imagine, dream and wonder. Discover the inspirational landscapes that are at the heart of the magical world of Narnia.




Legananny Dolmen, County Down

Dolmen means 'stone table' in ancient Breton. It is a dramatic burial tomb from Ireland's pre-historic past



Dunluce Castle, County Antrim: the inspiration for the palace of Cair Paravel?



The earliest indication of CS Lewis' love of swimming in the sea can be found in a letter from 1901 in which his mother informs her husband Albert that, 'Baby was very anxious to get into the water.' It was these childhood holidays of sand and sea that instilled in Lewis a love of swimming that remained with him throughout his life. One of the highlights of CS Lewis' childhood was the annual seaside holiday with his mother and brother, normally to the resort of Castlerock, County Londonderry, where they would stay for up to six weeks at a time, also visiting the nearby resorts of Downhill, Portrush and Ballycastle.

Among the romantic ruins of Dunluce Castle and the windswept beaches of the Causeway Coast, we can detect something of the origins of Cair Paravel. In 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' we read: 'The castle of Cair Paravel on its little hill towered up above them; before them were the sands, with rocks and little pools of salt water, and sea weed, and the smell of the sea, and long lines of bluish green waves breaking forever and ever on the beach. And oh, the cry of the sea-gulls! Have you heard it? Can you remember?'

These holidays instilled in Lewis a sense of the geography of Ulster and the wider landscape which he was to incorporate into the childhood stories and drawings that so absorbed his imagination. His earliest writings were coloured by his environment. The Irish landscape provided CS Lewis with an unchanging link with his past and an endless source of inspiration.

In 1914 as a pupil at Malvern College in England, Lewis chose to write 'a poem in imitation of Horace asking a friend to stay with you at the most beautiful spot you know' and selected Castlerock, but finding the name 'impossible in verse' changed it to Moville, the village just across the bay from Castlerock at the mouth of the Foyle in County Donegal.

Indeed, the attachment CS Lewis felt for this area can be seen in the impression the area had on his imagination: the whole concept of 'Northernness' that was so important to him and to which he refers in 'Surprised by Joy,' owes a great deal to the imaginative influence of the rugged coastline of the North of Ireland. Places that meant so much to Lewis and to which he returned again and again: Rathmullan, Portsalon, Inver, Castlerock, Portrush, Donaghadee are all rugged costal locations.

Lewis describes how this sense of 'Northernness' stirred within him indescribable feelings of sadness and longing for vast empty spaces and cold remote places. He had read of places such as these in the stories of William Morris and tales from Norse mythology. He was also deeply moved by the music of Richard Wagner, whose operas dramatised episodes from the Norse sagas and which he felt captured the essence of his feelings for 'Northernness' in a way in which words could not. It was to be some time before he understood that these emotions had a spiritual origin and that the searching for the root of these feelings would lead him to revisit the Christian faith of his childhood.


For CS Lewis the diversity of the Irish landscape is capable of evoking fantastic images and awakening his imagination: 'I have seen landscapes (in the Mourne Mountains) which, under a particular light, made me feel that at any moment a giant might raise his head over the next ridge. Nature has that in her which compels us to invent giants: and only giants will do.' CS Lewis did exactly that in the Narnian story, 'The Silver Chair,' where Puddleglum and the children narrowly escape the giants as they make their way across the 'wild waste lands of the North.'

It is this ability to look at the world around us in a new light, to see the world through a child's eyes, that makes Lewis' stories so vivid: his childhood, spent within sight of the mountains of Antrim and Down, was among Lewis' most vivid memories and these 'unattainable blue hills' helped to encourage this imaginative temperament. '*The Hills of Down*' is Lewis' poem in praise of the landscape which he loved so much:

*For I alone
Have loved their loneliness;
None else hath known
Nor seen the goodliness
Of the green hills of Down.
The soft low hills of Down.*

The County Down landscape was central to the inspiration for the landscape of Narnia: walking in the shadow of the Mourne Mountains near the village of Rostrevor, Lewis confided to his brother Warren that this area, which overlooks Carlingford Lough, was his idea of Narnia. The 'turbulent democracy of little hills' that is the County Down landscape exerts a powerful emotional and creative influence on Lewis. On one 'very hot walk in the high places of the Mourne Mountains', CS Lewis and Warren stopped to quench their thirst in a dark brown rushing torrent, when CS Lewis added that he wished they had 'done this in Saturn's time, when the stream would have been flowing Guinness.'



A photograph of a stone cross on a mountain peak. The cross is made of dark, rough-hewn stone and stands on a rocky outcrop. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under a clear sky. The foreground shows a rocky slope with some snow patches.

Summit of Slieve Donard, County
Down, looking into the Mourne
Mountains

‘I have seen landscapes which,
under a particular light, made me feel
that at any moment a giant might raise
his head over the next ridge.’



CS Lewis honoured in new Library at Queen's University Belfast

Queen's University plans to pay tribute to CS Lewis by designing a special Reading Room in his honour in the University's new library due to open in 2009.

The new £44 million library project epitomises the University's vision to be an international research-driven centre of excellence at the heart of the local community. The new facility will be the centrepiece of Queen's £200 million building programme to create a campus that will be the envy of the world. It will make a distinctive contribution to the Belfast skyline and the aesthetic qualities of the Queen's Conservation Area.

The present library accommodation remains fundamentally unchanged since 1969 when the Science Library opened.

Since then, the number of students has increased from around 6,000 to 24,000.

To be located on the main campus, the new library symbolises Queen's faith in the future of Belfast and Northern Ireland. It will play a leading role in sustaining and expanding the local knowledge-based economy and will complement Belfast City Council's strategy for the renaissance of the city. Boston-based architects Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott (SBRA) are world leaders in designing and developing academic libraries. SBRA is working in association with Robinson Patterson Partnership Belfast.

The new library is not only the largest building project on campus but also the most significant fundraising initiative

in the University's history. The fundraising campaign has been spearheaded by The Queen's University of Belfast Foundation, and much of the funding for the project has come from philanthropic sources locally, nationally and internationally.

The doors to the world of Narnia will soon belong to Queen's University. The filmmakers have gifted the design of the wardrobe doors used in *The Chronicles of Narnia: 'The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe'* to the University. These will be incorporated in the CS Lewis Reading Room within the new library which will provide a unique place of study for generations of students.

Christian Heritage

‘I was born in Holy Ireland, where there are no snakes because St. Patrick sent them all away.’

The Christian heritage of ‘Holy Ireland’ can embrace not only Saint Patrick’s vision of Ireland as a land of saints and scholars, but a child’s spiritual experience in a garden in Belfast. Standing next to a flowering currant bush on a summer day, the young CS Lewis suddenly became aware of something he felt he had experienced before, ‘a memory of a memory’, of a time at Dundela Villas when his brother Warren had presented him with a toy garden made from moss and leaves in an old biscuit tin that triggered a feeling of enormous bliss, or joy, that was tinged with a delectable longing. But a longing for what? He only knew that, ‘as long as I live my imagination of paradise will retain something of my brother’s toy garden.’

The experience changed his life forever and over 30 years later he would write: ‘From our own childhood we remember that before our elders thought us capable of “understanding” anything, we already had spiritual experiences as pure and as momentous as any we have undergone since.’

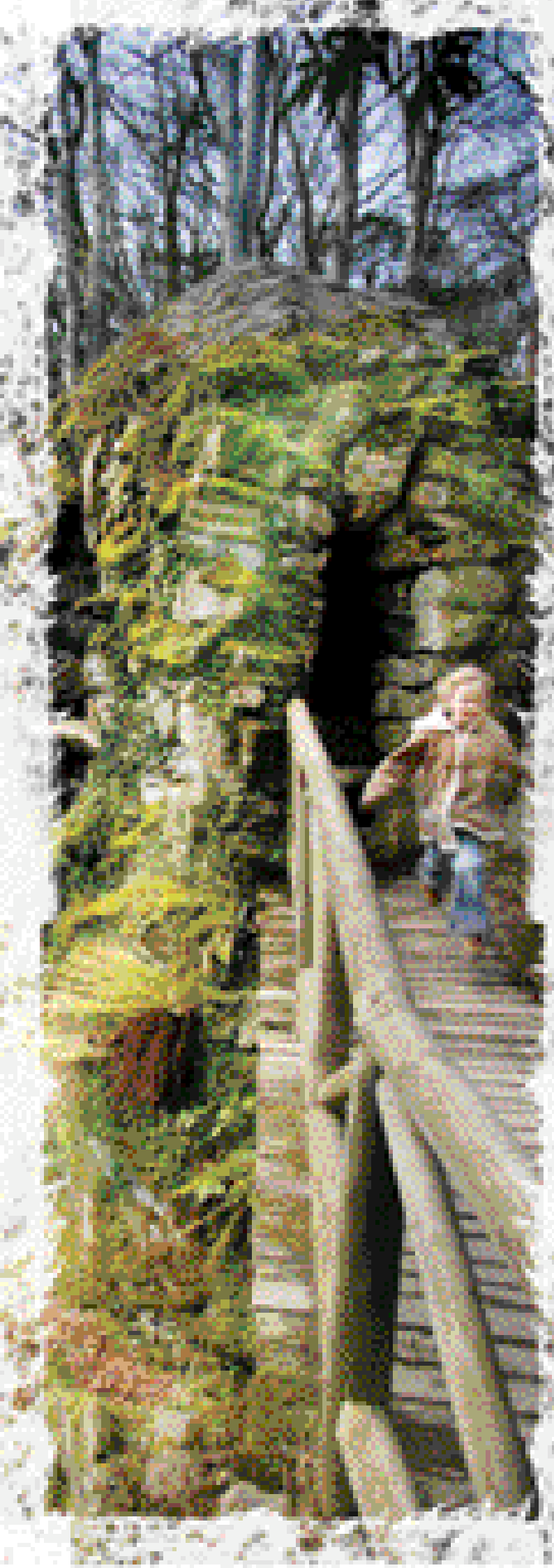
When CS Lewis abandoned the intellectual atheism which had dominated much of his early manhood and embraced Christianity he recognised these early events for what they were - spiritual signposts, ‘not the wave but the wave’s imprint on the sand.’

CS Lewis thought it important to stress those elements of Christian belief which unite believers, what he called other ‘mere Christians’, whilst holding firm to his own beliefs. He remained and continually described himself as a ‘very ordinary layman of the Church of England.’

CS Lewis is a writer who remains relevant today in his readiness to address the fundamental questions of Christian belief. He has been called the ‘apostle to the Sceptics,’ due in some part, to his ability to present complex moral arguments in language that almost everyone can understand or as Lewis once wrote, ‘any fool can write learned language. The vernacular is the real test.’

Lewis wrote his first Christian work ‘The Pilgrim’s Regress’ during a fortnight’s holiday at Bernagh in August 1932. This was the home of his closest friend, Arthur Greeves. The house was in later years a nursing home named ‘Red Hall’ and was situated just across the road from Little Lea before being demolished in 2003.





Myth, Magic & Mystery

CS Lewis' love of Celtic myths and legends began in his childhood in Belfast where his nurse Lizzie Endicott would tell him tales of leprechauns with their pots of buried gold, of the Shidhe or fairy-folk and of the 2000 year old Epic of Cuchulain.

The means by which the Pevensie children depart from Narnia at the end of 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' strongly suggest that Lewis is carefully employing elements of Irish myths and legends to trigger events in the imaginative world of Narnia.

This can be seen when the four children hunt the white stag at the end of 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' before chasing him into a thicket (past the lamp-post) only to find themselves come tumbling out of the wardrobe and back into this world. In Celtic mythology the stag often entices humans into the Otherworld.

Lewis also loved the mythological seafaring adventures he read in 'The Odyssey' and that most famous of Irish seafaring tales, 'The Voyage of St Brendan.' The influence of these works can be found in the most explicitly 'Irish' of the Narnian stories 'The Voyage of the Dawn Treader'. We know that among the wonders presented to St. Brendan on his voyage (and of particular interest as regards Lewis' use of the old Irish material) was the 'island full of furry mice as large as cats' and the island of 'dwarfs and leprechauns.' In Lewis' 'The Voyage of the Dawn Treader' we meet the valiant and pugnacious 'Chief Mouse' of Narnia called Reepicheep, who bears more than a passing resemblance to the mice described by St. Brendan.

The Hermitage at Tollymore Forest Park,
Mourne Mountains, County Down

In absorbing and transforming these influences, Lewis creates an imaginative world that celebrates the mythology of his homeland.

The Ulster landscape that CS Lewis loved so much provided a concrete, unchanging link to his past: whilst he would suffer the loss of loved ones, his homeland still exerted an emotional pull. In a letter to his Belfast neighbour, Arthur Greeves, he writes of value of such words as 'Causeway' and 'Portrush,' adding that it is not so much the places themselves that stir him, but that they call up the feeling of childhood holiday arrangements that put him back for the moment 'in a world where Castlerock and Newcastle, County Down, seemed as far away as Edinburgh and Paris do now.'

CS Lewis' love for Ireland never left him. Even in the last years of his life he always returned. He was planning, up to July 1963, to take a holiday in Ireland, with his stepson Douglas Gresham, to see Arthur Greeves and they had booked rooms at Portstewart and Donegal but had to cancel the trip due to his ill health. His death, four months later, on 22 November 1963, meant that this much longed for return to his homeland was never realised.

It was Warren Lewis who best summed up his brother's love of the Irish countryside: 'what he sighed for was the lost simplicity of country pleasures, the empty sky, the unspoilt hills, the white silent roads on which you could hear the rattle of a farm cart half a mile away.'

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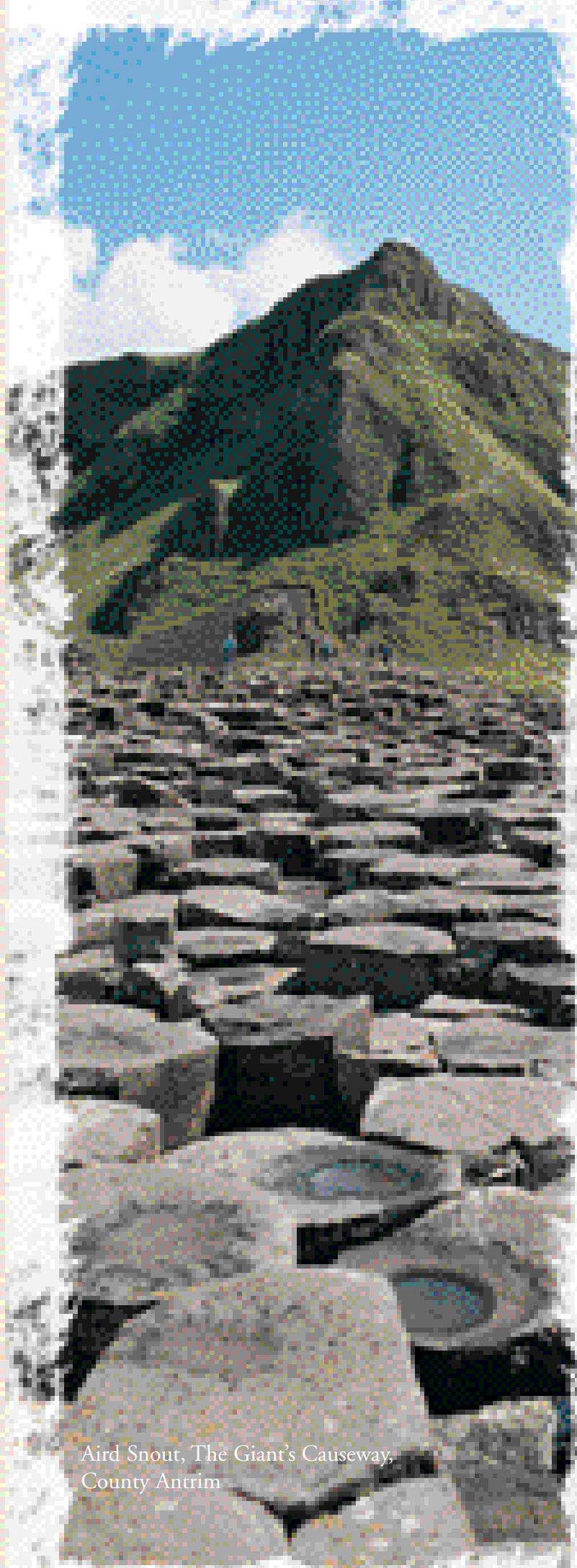
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CS Lewis Sites:

Photographs taken from the CS Lewis collection at the Linen Hall Library:

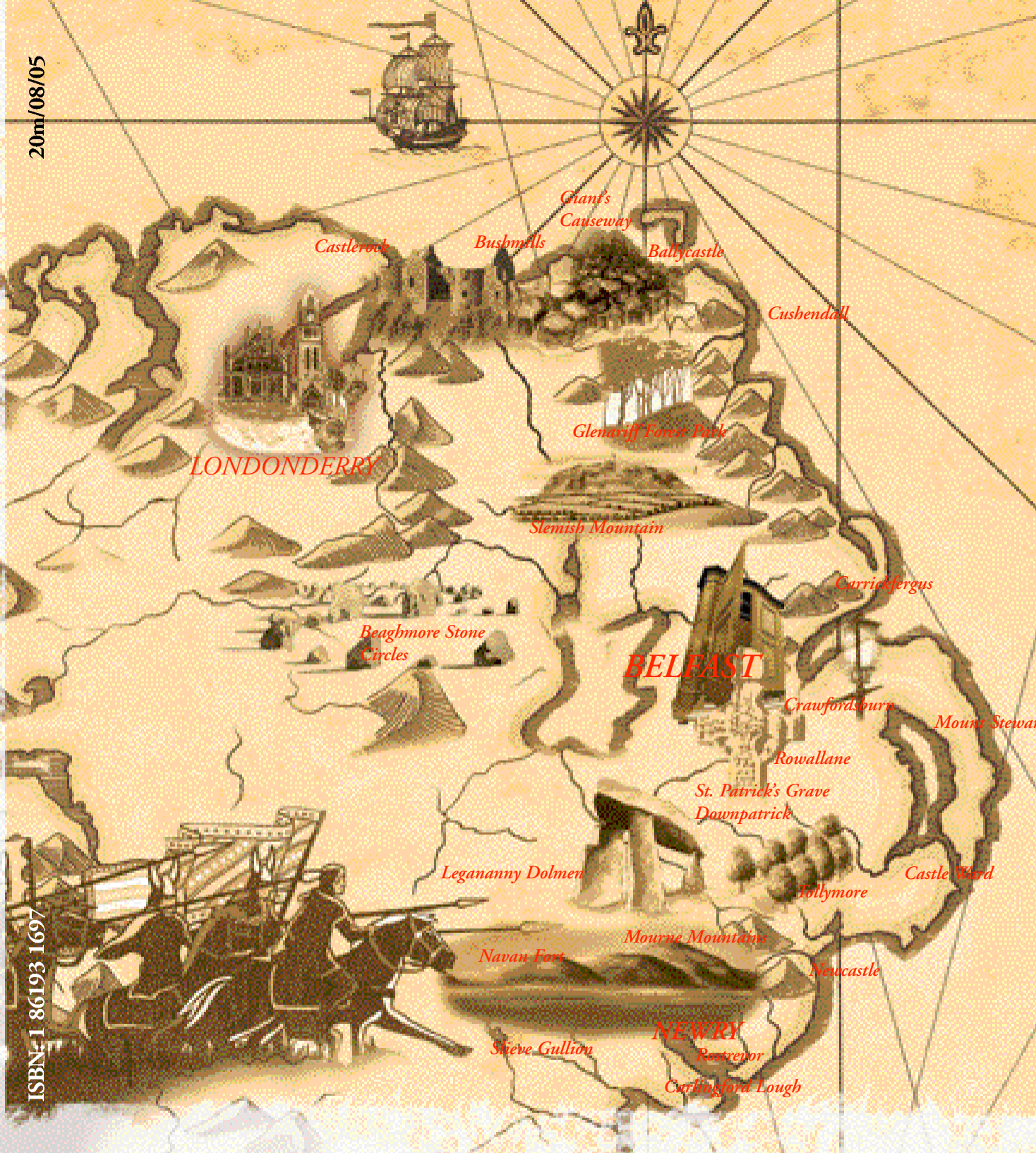
CS Lewis: The Lion on the Hill, J.C. Beckett, 1978, Belfast
CS Lewis – at home in Ireland, David Bleakley, 1998, Bangor
Brothers & Friends: An Intimate Portrait of CS Lewis, Kilby and Mead, 1817, San Francisco
JACK, CS Lewis And His Times, George Sayer, 1988, London



Aird Snout, The Giant's Causeway,
County Antrim

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