

NAMES ON THE COAST

Medieval fortifications at Dunluce, Dunseverick and Kinbane defended the coast from attack by sea.

This detail from a late 16th-century map in the Dartmouth Collection vividly illustrates the maritime lordship of the McDonnells. Centred on Dunluce Castle, their territory stretched from Northeast Ulster to Western Scotland. Reproduced courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



“ There is scarcely a spot at the Causeway to which the guides (to suit their own purposes and enhance their own importance) have not affixed some name. ”

James Boyle, Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland, 1835

DUNLUCE CASTLE

‘Luce’ could mean ‘sea-spirit’. Legend suggests the castle has a guardian spirit, Maeve Roe McQuillan. However, the name probably means ‘strong fort’, from *dún* and *lios*. Throughout Ireland, important forts associated with kings were often called *dún*.

DUNSEVERICK CASTLE

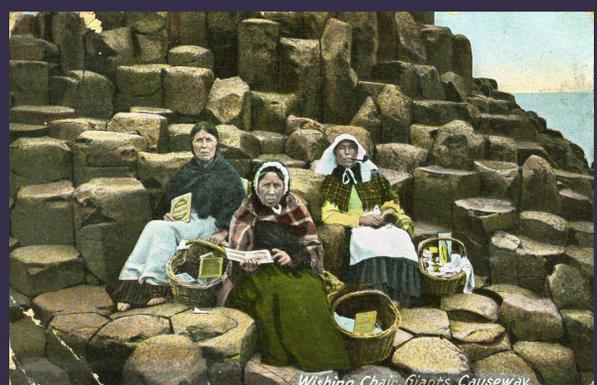
Dún Sobhairce – ‘Sobhairce’s fort’

These ruins are several hundred years old, but the name is much older. Sobhairce is supposed to have been the great-great-grandson of Míl, a mythical ancestor of the Irish people.

After these castles fell into ruin, tourism had an effect on the naming of coastal features.



Drawing of Dunseverick Castle by James Moore, 1852. Reproduced courtesy of the National Museums of Northern Ireland.



Early 20th-century postcard of the Giant's Causeway, showing ladies selling guide books and other souvenirs. Reproduced courtesy of Coleraine Museum

At the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site, current names mostly relate to a feature's shape, and some have been fleshed out with a story. The Giant's Eyeglass, a rock arch rising from the sea, has disappeared due to erosion.

Names have also been given to places used for bathing or fishing. For example, at Portcairn there are the Blue Hole and the Parten Hole. ‘Parten’ comes from the Irish for ‘crab’.

Near Kinbane, Gobe Feagh or Raven's Point is also known as Norton's Rock. Harry Norton fished there in the 1930s.

Kinbane – An Clonn Bán – ‘the white headland’. Courtesy of Nigel McDowell

