

The Learning to Learn Series

BOOK 3

NAOISE O'HAUGHAN

**The Outlaw
of
Antrim**

by

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Illustrations by B. Coulter

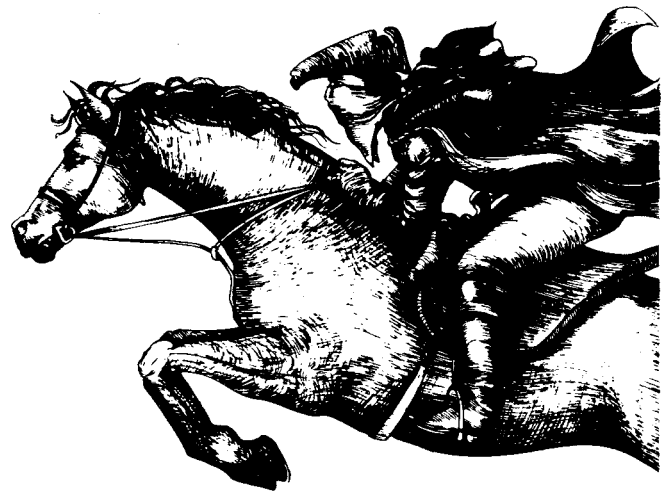
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Men Of the Road

Large rewards were offered for their capture, dead or alive, and many sums were granted and paid at each assize held at Carrickfergus between the years 1710 and 1730. The spikes on the jails of Carrickfergus, Armagh, Derry, Downpatrick and Dundalk were replenished each time the courts sat, with the heads of the executed outlaws, whilst many of the settlers received large rewards for killing the outlaws and bringing in their heads.

(F. J. Bigger, 1895)

You will have read stories of highwaymen robbing mail coaches and shouting "Stand and deliver!". Dressed in three cornered hats and long frock coats they carried out daring acts, always preying on the rich and never harming the poor. Most likely though you will not have known that Ireland had its own share of highwaymen. The outlaws mentioned above earned their living by robbing travellers on the roads of the north of Ireland in the early 18th century. There is almost certain to have been a highwayman who, during this period, roamed the countryside where you now live.

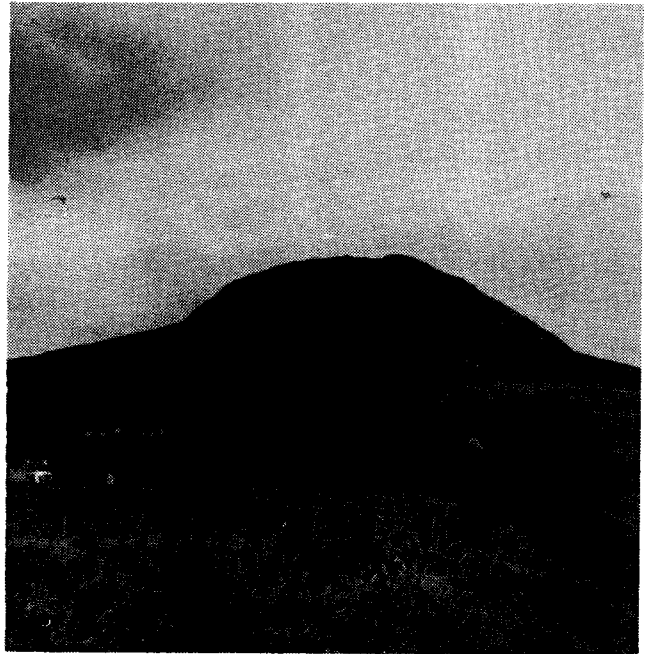


The story in this book is about one of the most famous highwaymen to live in the north of Ireland at that time. His name was **Naoise O'Haughan**. You can pronounce his name Nee-sha, or if you prefer you can call him Ness, Niece or Nussy as he was known by all of these names.

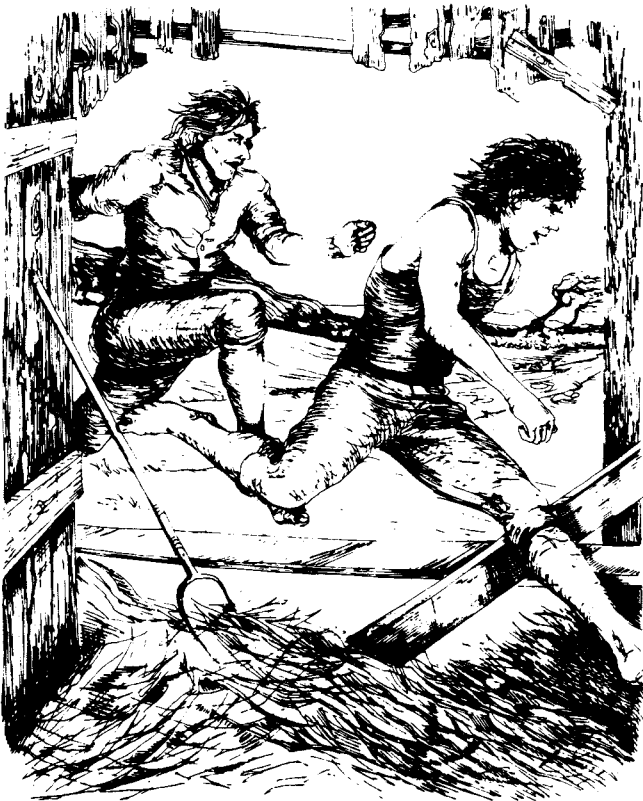
Naoise O'Haughan

The Early Years

About the year 1690 at Skerry in the valley of the Braid river in County Antrim, Naoise O'Haughan was born. Growing up with his brothers Sean and Denis near the slopes of Slemish he would often hear from his mother and father of how they had once been rich farmers before the settlers came and stole their lands. Now Sean O'Haughan and his wife were renting a small patch of ground and they had trouble trying to find the money when the landlord's agent came for it. Naoise and his brothers felt bad about their father's misfortune and swore that when they grew to be men they would make the new settlers pay.

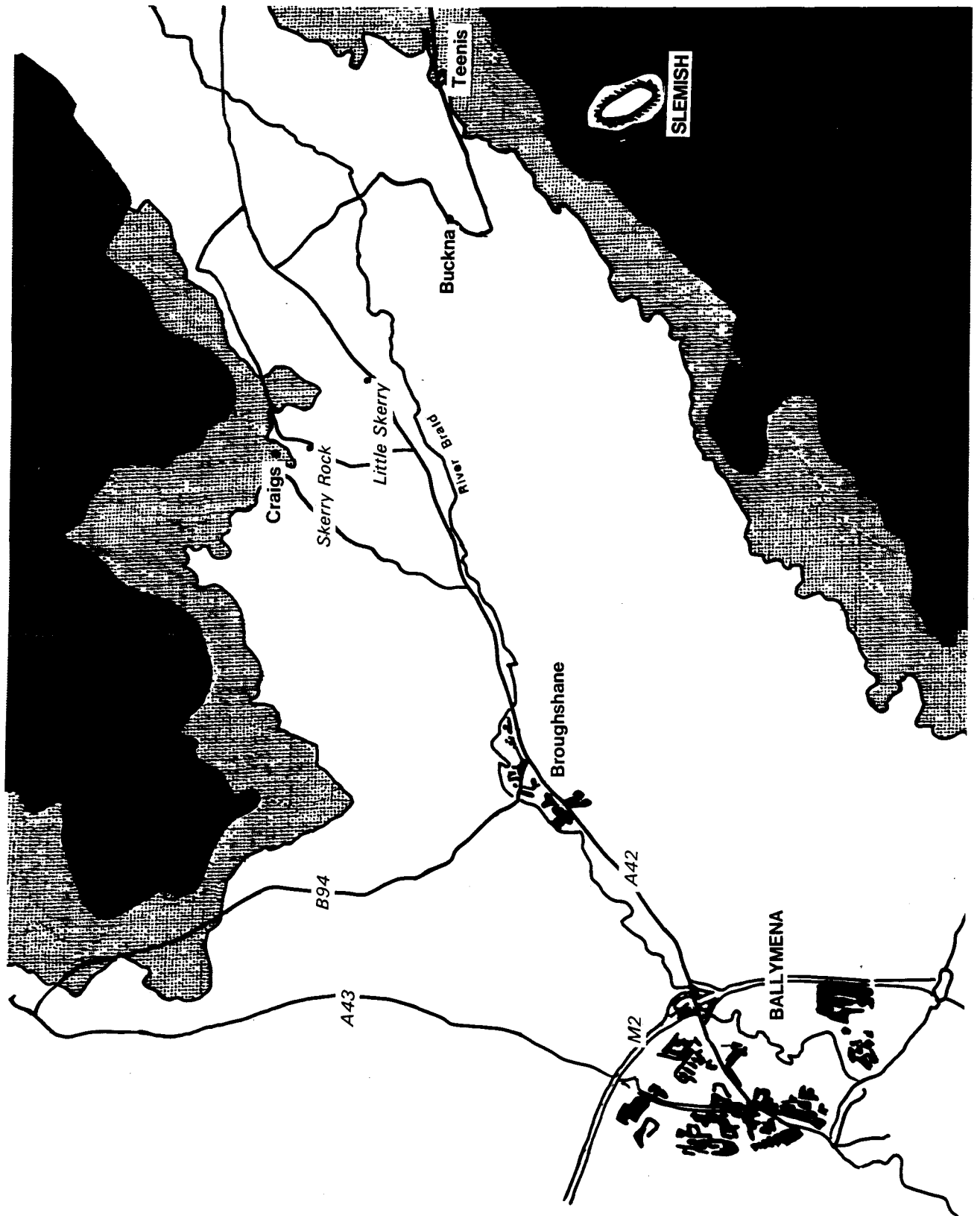


Slemish (Slieve Mis) Co. Antrim



The three boys were well known in the countryside around Skerry because some people thought that they were wild and always looking for trouble. In spite of this, there were many who admired them, as they were all so good at running and jumping and were very fit and strong. The finest athlete of the three was Naoise who could outrun and out-jump any boy in the Braid valley. Their parents are said to have trained the boys in running and jumping by opening up the doors on either side of their barn and making the boys run through. As the boys ran, the mother and father thrashed at their legs with wooden flails, so the boy who could run fastest and jump furthest got least knocks.

Map 1



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The Outlaw Band

When Sean and Naoise were teenagers they 'took to the road', determined to make a living by plundering the farms of the Scottish and English settlers. They formed an outlaw band and visited farms by night, robbing the farmers or blackmailing them. Blackmail was their favourite means of getting money. They would ask the farmers for money and agree to leave their farms alone for a while. If they refused they would find some night that their pigs had been killed or their hay had been set on fire.

Eventually the farmers of the Braid valley decided to take it no longer. A warrant for the arrest of the O'Haughans was issued from the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace at Ballymena on 16 January 1717.

It read,

***We the Grand Jury present
Shane Oge O'Haughan and
Neece O'Haughan, both of Braid
and Daniel Roe McAuley of
Ballyeman in the barony of
Glenarm to be notorious Rogues
and Robbers out upon their
keeping and not amenable to the
law and refuse to be brought to
justice.***

[Collection of presentments — Public
Record Office for Northern Ireland]

The farmers of the Braid got together to hunt the O'Haughan gang. An old poem tells us what happened,

The bold Niece O'Haughan
And Sean Og the Tory;
Little Owen Murphy and
His younger brother Rory;
Randal Dhu Agnew,
MacKinstry and Magennis,
Though half the Braid pursue,
Make good the Upper
Teenies.

The last man in the rear
Had barely cleared the
clachan
When a bullet grazed his hair,
'Twas the burly Niece O'
Haughan.
"Stand comrades now," he cried
"Why flee ye in such hurry?
Let's tame the Begg's pride,
And cove the Craigs of
Skerry.

Range round your chief, my
men,
These are but shabby fellows
We'll fight them one to ten
Ere we swing upon the
gallows."
With that whizzed through the
air
A bullet frae the callen,
Which carried off the ear
O' singin' Robin Allen.

At that point the posse of farmers
turned and ran off in panic.

While the O’Haughan gang had many enemies they also had plenty of friends. Once when the harvests had been very bad and the poor farmers of the Braid valley had given the last of their money as rent to their landlord, the landlord’s agent (rent collector) had his house burgled and all the rent money stolen. The next morning each farmer found a little bag with his rent money in it, hanging on his door. The people knew who had done this for them and Naoise O’Haughan had many places in which to hide if he was in trouble.

However, there was money to be gained by anyone who was bold enough to capture or kill the O’Haughan gang and eventually the famous band of highwaymen was broken up.

The records show us that,

**John Mac Crea received
a reward of £5
for the capture of
Randall Dhu Agnew.
Executed at Carrickfergus
1717.**

Two other members of the gang, Rory Murphy and Toal Magennis, were so sure that they too would be captured and end up on the gallows that they decided to leave the country and avoided this fate.

Finally the hunters closed in on Naoise and Sean. Sean’s brother in law was a man called James MacKinstry. He knew that Sean would trust him and that he could lure him from his hideout. He made up a story about Sean’s wife being very ill and told Sean that she had asked to see him as she thought that she was dying. Because of his concern for his wife, Sean followed him into a trap. MacKinstry had men waiting who overpowered the outlaw. Naoise was with Sean at the time but he managed to escape. His brother was handed over to the authorities in Carrickfergus.

The records show us that,

**John Edmonston, William
Craig and Daniel MacCart
each got £3 for assisting
in the capture.**

**Samuel, Robert and Hugh
Beggs divided £12 amongst
them for leading the way.**

**James MacKinstry got £10
for tricking the outlaw
and knocking him out.**

Sean Og O’Haughan was hanged at Carrickfergus in 1718.

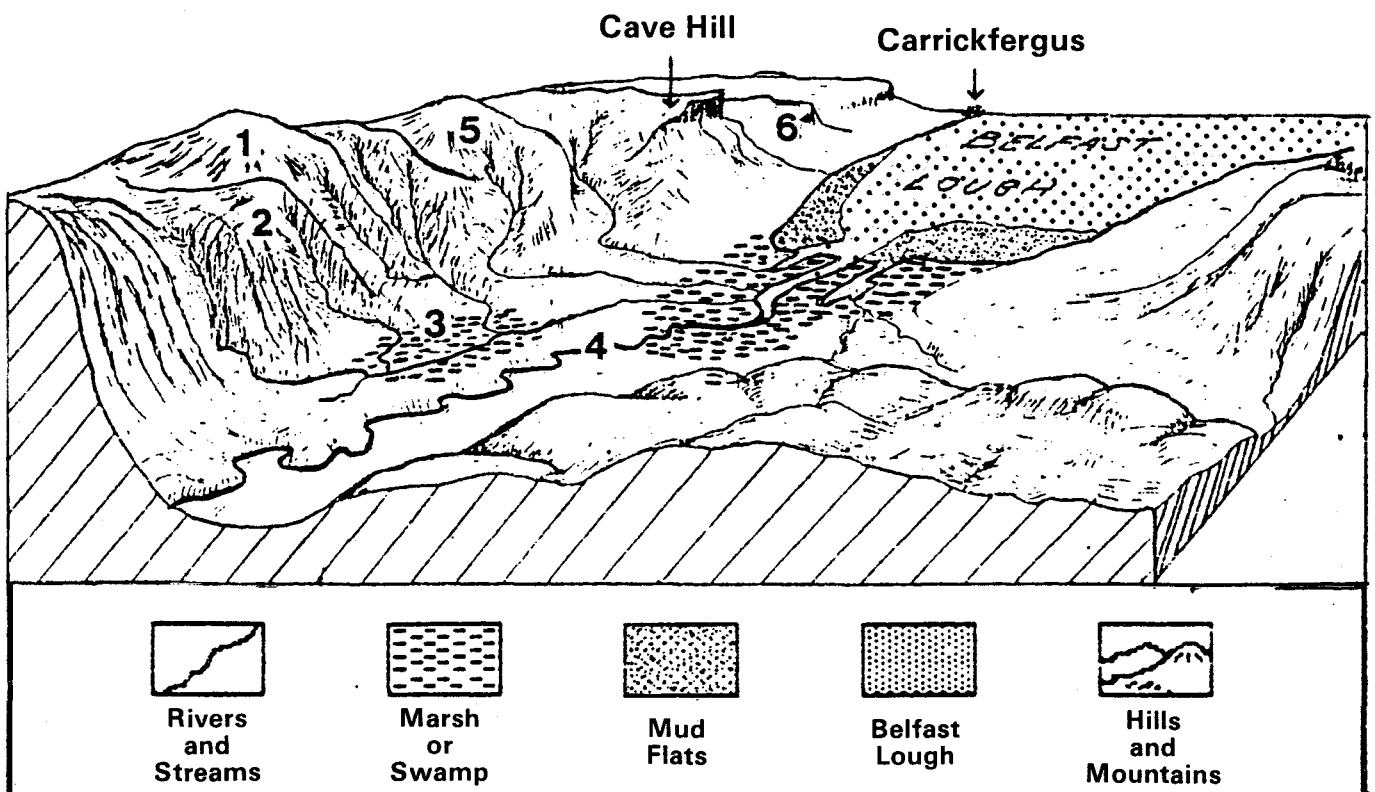
The Chase

An old story tells us that Naoise watched his brother being hanged from a hiding place on the side of Knockagh mountain. It is known that he found shelter there in the cottage of Widow Jaques, the widow of a Presbyterian minister. After Sean's death Naoise carried out so many acts of revenge that a troop of soldiers was sent out from Carrickfergus Castle to track him down. Naoise returned to the Braid valley but was instantly recognized. The soldiers were informed and the outlaw was forced to flee, on foot, with a troop of dragoons hard on his heels.

Naoise was convinced that he could outrun the soldiers. After all, he had

done it plenty of times before. He would head for the Belfast mountains. He knew them well and they were the most difficult ground he could think of. Sure enough, he seemed to be shaking them off as he scrambled over Divis and round the side of Black Mountain. From there he headed into the valley and across the Bog Meadows towards the little earthen-walled town of Belfast. It is said that Naoise could beat anyone in a run across those mountains but in the valley he lost his stride and the soldiers began to catch up. In front of the outlaw was the River Lagan and behind him the dragoons began to spread out. The river was at least six metres wide at this point so the soldiers were sure that he could

Cross Section of Site of Belfast

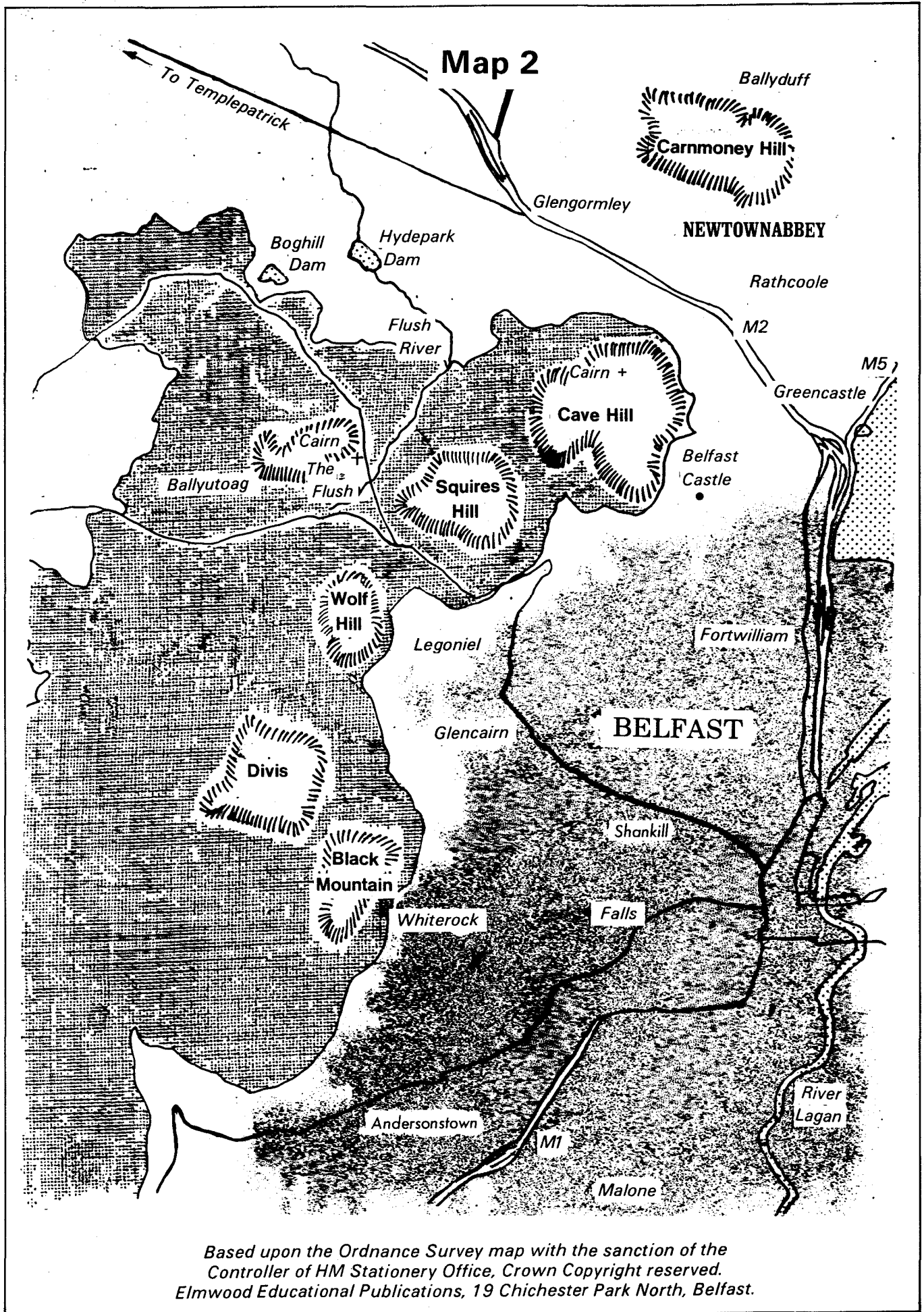


not cross it. Over his shoulder he could see some of the soldiers heading up the river bank and others heading downstream to make certain that he could not escape in either direction. Faced with capture and certain death, Naoise ran straight for the bank and jumped the River Lagan in one great leap. The dragoons froze with their mouths open, hardly believing what they had seen. An old man who had been ploughing on the far bank of the river looked up and declared that in his long lifetime he had never seen the like of the jump before.

"That may well be so," laughed Naoise, *"but no one ever took a twenty mile run at it before."*

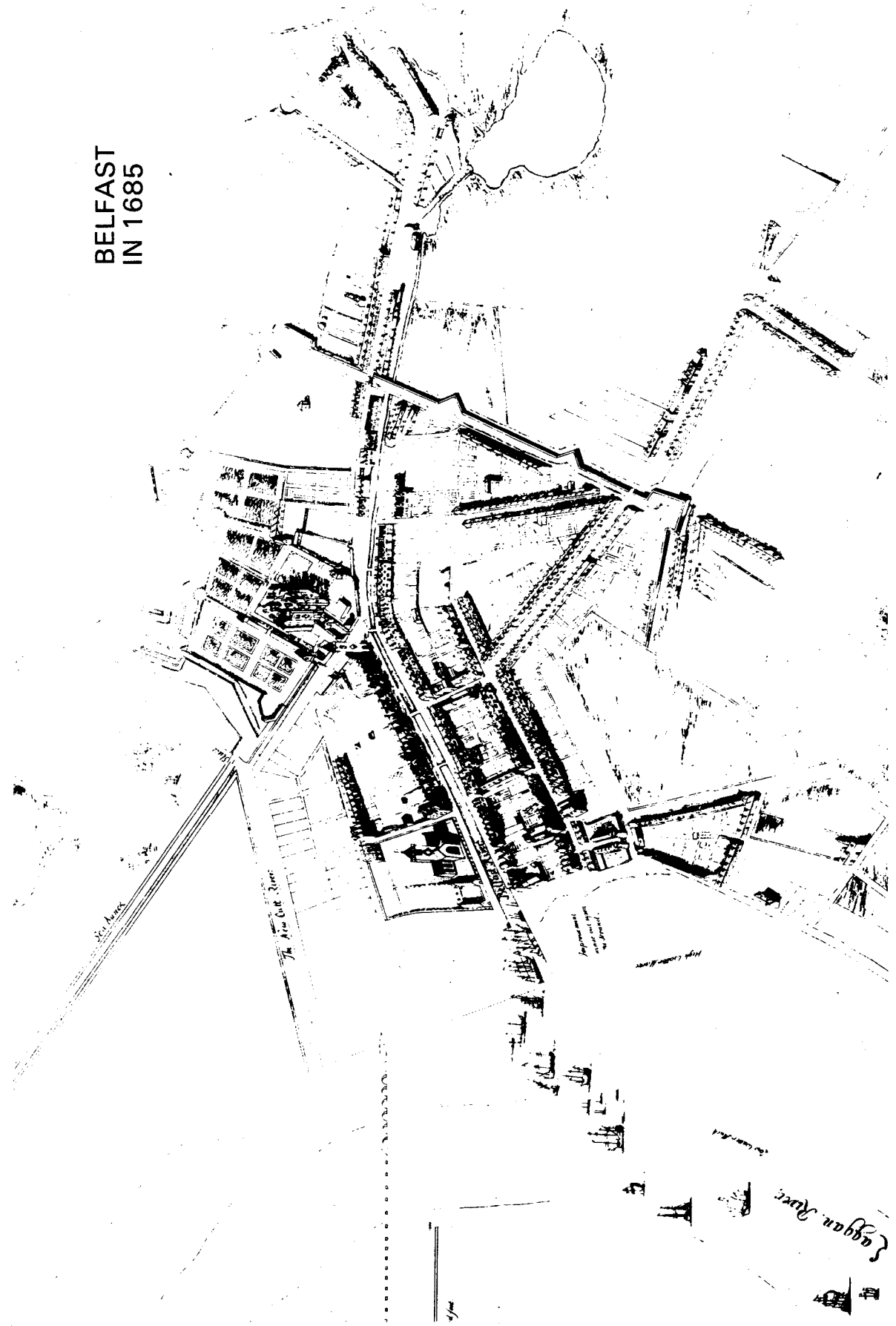
Relieved to have escaped again, O'Haughan became more careful about keeping his identity secret. He moved to a different area, hiding out with an old man called Allison in a cottage on Squire's Hill. During the next months he robbed countless travellers in an area from Templepatrick to Belfast and across the Cave Hill to Carnmoney and Kingsmoss. On one occasion he robbed at least twenty people who were on their way to the Lammas fair at Belfast. After each separate robbery he tied up his victims and hid them in a field so that they could not warn others of the danger they might meet on the road. By mid afternoon he not only had money but also the travellers' horses which he calmly took and sold at the fair.





Map 3

BELFAST
IN 1685



Scale: 1 cm to 75m

The Final Ride

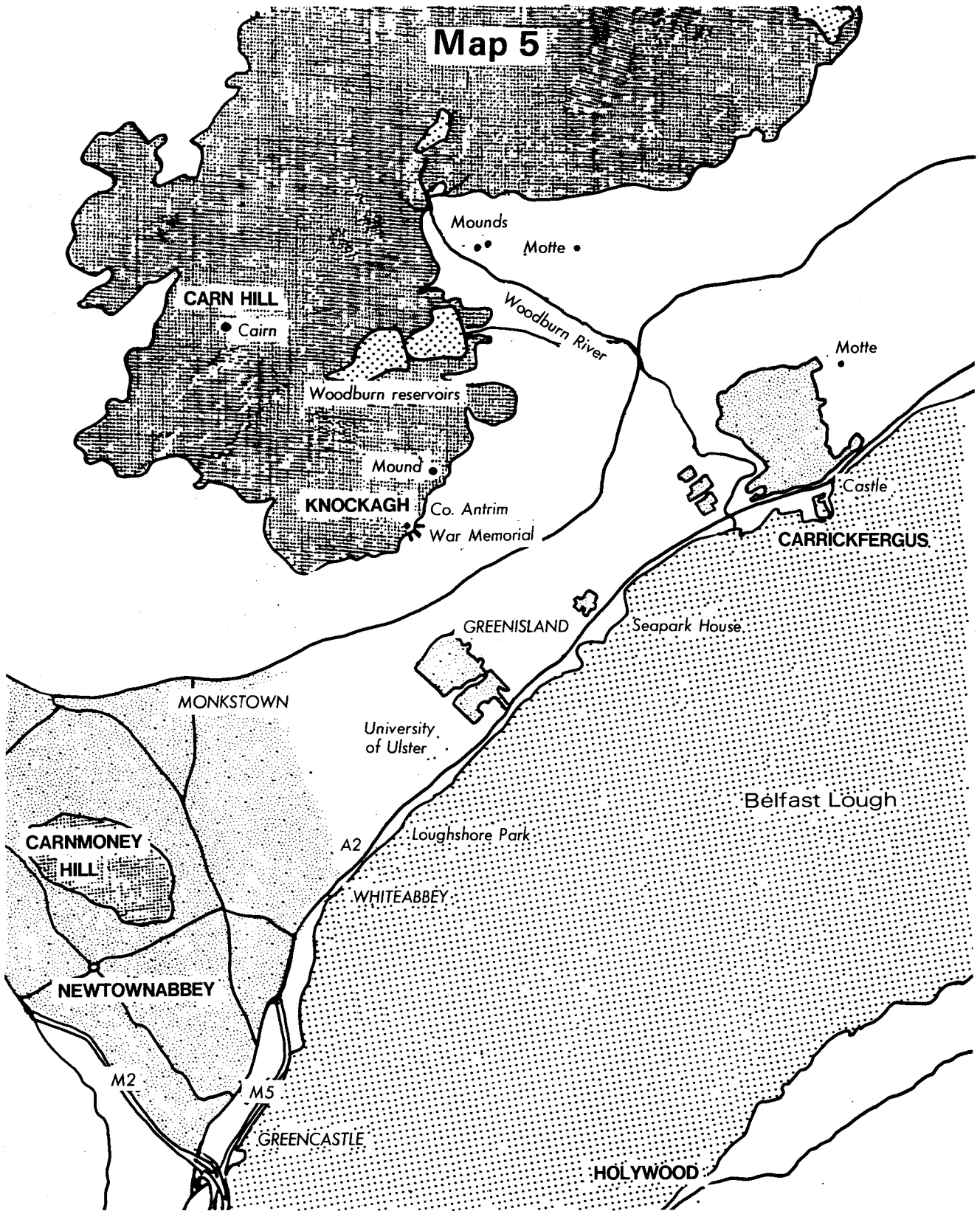


With a price on his head, dead or alive, Naoise could trust fewer people than before. To get away for a time he joined the army of King George, using a false name. His regiment was posted to County Louth and Naoise felt sure that no one would know him there and that no one would even think of looking for him in the army. It was a bold plan but a very risky one. The story goes that while in County Louth with the army his company were taking part in a sports day. The last event was jumping and a man from another company had jumped clear over two horses with their riders seated on them. No one from Naoise's company could equal that feat and so it looked like they would lose the contest. Then Naoise stepped forward, asking the captain if he could try. Permission was granted and of course the great

athlete jumped the obstacle easily. The contest might have ended in a draw if Naoise had not asked for another horse and rider to join the two. This was done and with a short run and a huge leap he cleared the three horses and riders with room to spare. The entire company were delighted but Naoise did not have long to enjoy the praise showered on him. Among the spectators was one of the dragoons who had chased him across the Belfast mountains to the Lagan and he was quick to inform the commanding officer of the jump he had witnessed that day.

"No man could jump that way, save Naoise O'Haughan, the outlaw of Antrim," he declared. O'Haughan was called for questioning and it was proved by a birthmark on his body that he was indeed the famous outlaw.

Map 5



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The Treasure

The story would end there except for one important item, namely the whereabouts of Naoise O'Haughan's treasure. There are several versions of what happened to the treasure, none of which can be proved.

One story has it that the treasure is buried somewhere on **Carnmoney Hill**, in the modern town of Newtownabbey but most versions favour a location in the townland of **Ballyutoag** which lies above Belfast between Legoniel and Templepatrick.



Cathal O'Byrne in his book 'As I Roved Out' has said that the treasure was found by a man called Johnston, who overheard Naoise telling a friend of its whereabouts on the day of his hanging. The treasure was a topboot full of golden guineas

and was under a cairn of stones on the road near **Templepatrick**.

Francis Joseph Bigger in his 1895 pamphlet 'Aneas O'Haughan' gives us the most detailed account. He tells us that from the gallows Naoise asked if his friend Allison was in the crowd but the old man had not come as he did not want to see his friend hanged. Naoise then spoke to the onlookers saying, "*Go to Carn Hill and beside the Hanging Thorn you will find a box of money buried beneath the spot from which you can see five castles, five loughs and five counties; from that spot take five jumps to the east and you will find a foalskin of gold.*" Bigger says that Jack Johnston left the hanging and raced to the site of the treasure. He found the box of money but the foalskin was never found.



There are oral stories passed down through generations of folk living in the area that Naoise O'Haughan's treasure was never found and lies to this day buried somewhere in the townland of Ballyutoag.