

# THE WATCH HOUSES

AT SPRINGVALE AND MILL PARK BLEACH WORKS, LAWRENCETOWN, CO DOWN



THE  
FOLLIES TRUST

The stone structure in the field in front of you is a watch house. It is one of six such structures originally built in the mid 19th century to provide weather protection for a watchman guarding valuable linen cloth spread out on the grass for bleaching. A few fields away there is a second watch house to a different design (see photos).

Until the advent of more sophisticated technology, the bleaching of linen was a long-drawn-out process, requiring the rolls of cloth to be repeatedly treated with bleaching agents and ‘grassing’, the exposure of the material to daylight out in the bleach fields adjacent to the mills. This practice continued into the 1950s.

This field and adjacent ones formed part of the Springvale and Mill Park bleach works owned by the Uprichard family. The Mill Park bleach works became derelict in the 19th century but Springvale only closed down in 1955.

Only two of these six watch houses have survived in their original setting, with a further one having been taken away and rebuilt at the Ulster Folk Museum at Cultra.

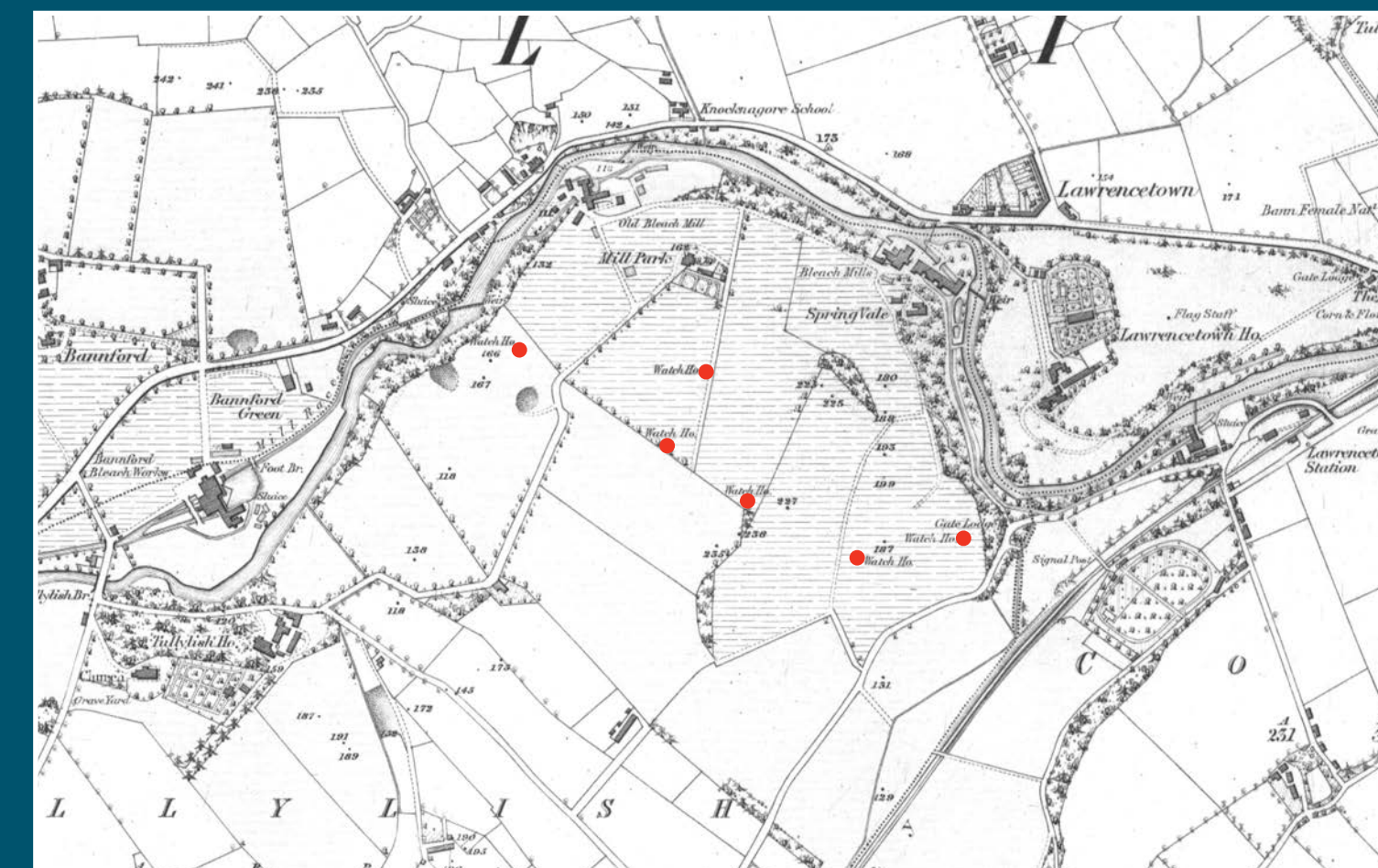
In 2013, the Follies Trust ([www.follies-trust.org](http://www.follies-trust.org)) restored the two remaining structures, with grant aid from the Community Landfill Fund and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.



These photographs illustrate their condition before and after restoration. They now form an important reminder of the heritage of linen manufacture in this area which until the mid 20th century provided employment for many thousands of people.



This picture, probably dating back to the 1930s, illustrates rolls of cloth being laid out at the former Bannford bleach works, a short distance from here, as shown on the Ordnance Survey map. The chimney and some of the buildings have survived and now house the Pot Belly restaurant and Tullylish potteries.



The 1860s Ordnance Survey map shows six such watch houses in this and nearby fields, demonstrating how important it was to prevent theft of the linen cloth during the bleaching process. Attempted theft was punishable by the death sentence up to 1810 but even after that date culprits could face deportation.

The land on which the watch houses are situated is private property and in agricultural use.

Please do not trespass.

For more information about these watch houses see [www.follies-trust.org](http://www.follies-trust.org)

It is possible for a group to visit these watch houses by prior arrangement through contacting the Follies Trust website [info@follies-trust.org](mailto:info@follies-trust.org) or on European Heritage Open Days.

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