In March 1811 Henry Sharvin acquired this property from Reverend Stuart Blacker and his family ran the business as a Spirit Grocers and car garage for almost 180 years. In 1910 they also began a bus service.

John and Margaret Sharvin had nine children. The Census of Ireland 1911 shows them living in the property with four of their sons, Thomas, William, James and Senan. John’s occupation is given as a publican and grocer, Thomas’s as a farmer, William’s as a grocer, James’s as a potato merchant and Senan’s as an auctioneer.

The McErleans purchased The Cuan in 1989, rebuilt it and opened for business in 1991 as a bar and restaurant. In 1998 they added on 9 en-suite bedrooms and a chip shop thus ensuring the tradition of The Cuan as a village social hub.

Strangford was packed with spectators, when, in 1903, King Edward V11 came to Old Court to visit his friend Dudley, 24th Baron de Ros. Sharvin’s building was decorated for the visit with the greeting “Welcome back to Erin”.

After meeting local people and planting a tree, the King left by boat for Portaferry from where he travelled to spend the night at Mount Stewart.

How many fireplaces would this building have had?
James Elliott was an agricultural merchant who started business in Portaferry in 1862 and expanded to Strangford shortly afterwards.

These buildings were used as a grain store and mill with coal store behind in Stella Maris Street. Later they were used as a showroom for agricultural machinery and cars. The office was across the road where the weighbridge still is and the potato stores were at the Quay. In Portaferry James owned a shop, a number of warehouses and stables. During the 1970s, the last years of the potato trade, James Elliott and Company Ltd was the only potato merchant left in Portaferry and Strangford.

Born in County Fermanagh in 1838, James Elliott arrived in this area - one of the best grain districts in County Down - as a young man in the late 1850s. By 1872 his business was thriving and he was the owner of the schooner Lord Willoughby used for exporting potatoes and importing coal. He later owned the Sea Mew, the Pet and the Mary Ann and in 1891 he bought the 75 ton. Witch of the Wave which had an engine fitted in 1920.

James Elliott died in 1924 having handed over the business to his sons and grandson. This company closed in 1981 but for years accounted for a large proportion of the quayside activity in both Portaferry and Strangford.

Q. What inscription is above this building?
The land on which this church is built was donated in 1820 by Lord Henry Fitzgerald, who also largely subsidised the construction of the original church on this site. St. Mary’s church was a single storey building with a mud floor, slate roof, five small windows and five seats. Lord Fitzgerald also bequeathed the sum of £10 annually ‘in consideration of being allowed two seats for the use of visitors and servants.’

St. Mary’s church was irreparably damaged by fire in 1930 and the foundation stone of the new Stella Maris church was laid in June 1933. Designed by Thomas McLean, it was completed at a cost of £7000. Since its construction, Stella Maris church has played a vital role in the lives of local people. It has been a centre of welcome and support, not only to the Catholic population of the Strangford area, but to all sections of the community.

Lord Henry Fitzgerald was the son of the Duke of Leinster and grandfather of Lord de Ros. His brother, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, was an important leader of the United Irishmen. Lord Edward was captured in Dublin and taken to Newgate prison where he died, aged 34, on 4th June 1798 as the rebellion took place. Lord Henry was with him in his last moments.

Before 1820 Mass was celebrated in Strangford by the harbour at Newry Quay. It took place in a store owned by Samuel Norris, a local businessman and customs’ collector.

Q. Can you find the date 24th July 1932 outside this church?
In the 18th and 19th centuries there was a considerable volume of trade into Strangford Lough.

The Quay would have been thronged with ships’ crews and porters as timber arrived from America; sugar, rum and woollen cloths were unloaded from Liverpool; coal was landed from Whitehaven and whiskey came from Dublin. At the same time ships would be loaded with exports of corn, herrings, cattle, potatoes and kelp. At the end of the 18th century Strangford ranked eighth among the ports of Ireland.

In the 18th century the main taxes were duties on tobacco, tea and alcohol – particularly French brandy. This, perhaps, gave rise to the local rhyme:

‘Killyleagh for baps and tay, Strangford is for brandy.’
(Colm Rooney)

The Watch House, perched on the rocks at the edge of Ferry Quarter point, has been added to over the years and is now an impressive private home (best viewed from the Quay).

To combat smuggling in the first half of the 19th century, the Newry Custom House established a branch in Strangford and this former Watch House and boathouse, with its own quay, were constructed as a lookout station. There are many stories of local smugglers having to run the gauntlet of Revenue men stationed here. It is said that these Revenue men ‘in their black boaters’ were ashamed of their ‘contemptible’ occupation and so often turned a blind eye to what was going on under their noses.

Q. What makes this a good location for a lookout station?
Strangford and Portaferry are forty nine miles apart by land but little over half a mile by water. For trade and communication a ferry has always been a vital link and one has been here since at least the twelfth century.

In 1611 James I granted a ‘quarter’ of land on either side of the Lough to a Peirce Tumolton to maintain a strong ferry boat and four able ferrymen for the transport of men and livestock. In 1629 Lord Clandeboye regularised the service and made Valentine Payne responsible for maintaining a boat for the use of Patrick Savage.

In the 1800s two ferry boats were kept, one was for passengers and one for livestock. A group of local men formed the Portaferry and Strangford Steamboat Company in 1835 and commissioned the building of a forty ton paddle steamer. The venture was not commercially successful and she was auctioned in 1839.

In 1913 the Lizzie, used as a ferry boat, capsized and three passengers were lost. Tragedy struck again in 1947 when the ferry, a converted World War II landing craft, capsized and one man and all the animals aboard died.

Small ferry boats were then used until 1969 when Down District Council began to operate a large ferry capable of carrying vehicles and passengers.

Q. How do the tides affect how the ferry crosses the Lough?
Trade in Strangford Lough grew in the 1600s and was the reason for the existence of Strangford which became the main port. The Old Quay and slipway were built in the first half of the 17th century by Valentine Payne, agent to the Earl of Kildare. In 1629 he wrote to his employer stating, "I have builded a chapple from the ground for your Lordship. I have likewise builded you a key where there was none before, that the biggest shippe the King hath may lay beside her. Besides I have builded a custom house, and have bestowed in other buildings alone, above £300, and have resolved to dye your servant."

The quay was a substantial stone pier built with flat stones set vertically, with a minimum of mortar. The custom house which Payne mentions was also made of stone. At the same time a slipway for the ferrymen was constructed.

Until 1876 there were two quays in Strangford which were used for cargo, fishing and ferry boats. They were this Old Quay and the Newry Quay which was at the southern end of the harbour and was mostly used for unloading timber. In 1876 the New Quay, with a set of passenger steps, was built.

Q. Can you see the Watch House from here?

At low tide the Old Quay dried out and ships were left stranded until the next high tide when they floated alongside the Quay.

Rapid Expansion of Trade
1707 – 42 ships landed 531 tons of cargo
1795 – 143 ships landed 8,807 tons of cargo
1852 – trade through the port was 34,107 tons!
Although most of Strangford Castle was built in the 16th century, it incorporates some work on the ground and first floors from the century before.

It is a simple three-storey stone tower house which once had wonderful views over Strangford’s quays and harbour to Portaferry Castle on the other shore. It is almost square inside with walls that are over one metre thick. The tower rises to ten metres on the north and the building is built with rubble masonry and occasional large boulders. The entrance in the north east wall was protected by a machicoulion and the roof has very fine crenellations with pistol-loops. The first floor fireplace contains an oven and the ground floor chamber is lit only by small gun-loops.

Several other tower houses – Audley’s Castle, Portaferry Castle, Kilclief, Old Castleward - are located in this area and all were built to guard the entrance to Strangford Lough and adjacent important anchorage.

Q. How many gun loops can you see on this side of the castle?
At the end of Castle Street there is a narrow gap between the Old Court Estate Office and the last house. It is known locally as the Squeeze Gut and it leads over the hill behind the village, with a fine view of the Lough, before looping back to Strangford via tree-lined Dufferin Avenue.

William, 23rd Baron de Ros, with his wife Georgiana and family, came to live permanently in Strangford when their home, Old Court House, was completed in 1844. Although County Down was a lesser affected area in the worst famine years of 1845 – 47, there was still great hardship and starvation. To provide Employment Relief Work William commissioned the Squeeze Gut – a sunken path - to be dug out in 1847.

It is said that the Squeeze Gut was so named because Old Court farmers used it to drive their cattle that way to the ferry and larger beasts often had to squeeze through. Local folklore claims that it became a lovers’ lane where a boy might give his girl a ‘squeeze’!

19th Century benefits of the Squeeze Gut:

- Staff from Old Court could get home to the village without disturbing the gentry!
- Local residents could walk to Old Court Chapel without being seen by the gentry!
- Drunken seamen could pass by Old Court without being able to see the gentry!
- Two footbridges were built over the Squeeze Gut so the gentry could cross over without being seen by the common folk below!

Q. Can you find the years 1886 and 1906 inscribed in the wall on the right?
In 1839 the Duke of Leinster’s grandson, William, became the 23rd Baron de Ros and decided to make his principal seat in the port and village of Strangford which he had inherited.

This was the original entrance to his estate and led the way around the outside of the village to the family home which he built, in place of an earlier mansion, at Old Court in 1844.

In 1853 Lord Dufferin and Clandeboye planted the avenue as a wedding gift to Baron de Ros’s son Dudley and his new wife, Lady Elizabeth Egerton. For this fine present he paid for the widening and improvement of the main avenue to Old Court as well as the planting of lime trees.

It is now a public path over the wooded Compass Hill, through the Squeeze Gut to Castle Street, Strangford.

In the 1860s this avenue was on the same level as the road from which it leads. However, horses found the climb difficult when pulling cargoes of potatoes and coal from the harbour so Lord de Ros had the road lowered and a new access road built.

This means that the gatehouse and this entrance to Dufferin Avenue must now be accessed via stone steps.

Q. Can you find the plaque with the inscription on the left hand wall?
This church was originally built in the 1620s. Although there had been a church dedicated to St. Malachy on this site since medieval times, it had become a ruin after uniting with Saul parish.

By 1663 a lease for the ground had been issued and the church, which had been built by Payne, had been repaired by the Ward family who felt the need to provide a place of worship for their visitors and employees in nearby Castleward.

One of the most distinctive features of the church is the lych gate at the entrance. This roofed gateway was a gift from Admiral Ward in 1888.

The word lych comes from the Old English or Saxon word for corpse. A lych gate was where the clergyman met the corpse before the funeral service. It also kept the pall-bearers dry.

A tower was added in 1723 and in 1777 Lord Bangor paid for a steeple to be built. In 1836 the average attendance was 170 for the evening service. At this time the church was undergoing repairs for which the Ecclesiastical Commissioners had granted £295. The church was remodelled in 1882 by the Ward family in memory of Lady Bangor. The stone spire, topped by a ball and a weatherfish, is attractive and handsomely proportioned.

Q. To whom are the gates dedicated?