

The Arboretum, Gardens and Estate

The extensive grounds of Belvoir Estate included the current park, the Belvoir Housing estate, the golf club, Newtownbreda and Galwally. They were laid out before the house was built in gardens, paths, ponds and waterfalls. The house was on the site of the existing car park.

Many trees were planted by the Hill family even though the area was well wooded. In 1839 "the big wind", as it became known, blew down a thousand of the largest elms, Spanish chestnuts, firs, beeches and larches some of them 200 years old. However Sir Robert Bateson replanted these during the years 1841 to 1846. It is this interest in trees by the previous owners who planted the redwoods, cedars and other exotic species that gives the present Arboretum its centre.



Trees in the arboretum



Glasshouses at Belvoir

The Glasshouses

The glasshouses in Belvoir, built in 1757, were said to be the first in Belfast. In the 18th and 19th century glasshouses were very popular. The plants inside were protected from the wind and rain and sometimes they had additional heat which meant that exotic fruit and flowers could be grown. The types of plants grown may have included exotic trees and flowers and exotic fruit like bananas, pineapples and grapes. It also provided cut flowers for the 'big house'. The owners would again show their wealth and sophistication by providing their guests with exotic fruits and their house adorned with flowers, even out of season.

The Gardens



This is part of the old walled garden. In Victorian times these were very fashionable, the walls provided some level of protection from the elements as well as a physical structure demonstrating the social standing of the family. The garden would have been used for pleasure which was private and secluded. It would have provided most of the fruit and vegetables for the house. The kind of vegetables grown here may have included potatoes, carrots, lettuce, onion, garlic, leeks, beetroots, peas and beans. The type of fruit may have included blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, blackcurrant and redcurrants. There were orchards beside the gardens where they would have had apple and pear trees.

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The Pleasure Gardens

The pleasure gardens were located where the sewer pipe runs now – there is very little still visible and the area is very overgrown.

Canals and Terraces – stone waterfall 18th century feature.



There were a series of ornamental canals, bridges and terraces that were built to enhance the landscape of the gardens and some of these can still be seen today. They would have been used to provide interest while the residents of the house, especially the ladies, and their visitors went for gentle walks. We do not know for sure who designed the gardens, but it thought that the head gardener and his staff under the direction of the various landowners were responsible for their construction. Each landowner would have added their own touches and tastes to the design as fashions changed but it was the Hill family who first began the creation of gardens on the estate.



This is the original sundial from the gardens at Belvoir House. It still stands in Belvoir Golf Club.

Ornamental fish ponds

The ornamental fish ponds were built originally to provide something interesting for the family, and perhaps especially the ladies, to look at. These two photographs are taken from approximately the same angle about a hundred years apart. The lines indicate the location of the bank on each side and in the distance you can see the small stone bridge.



Then...



...and now

The Farms

The Belvoir Estate had quite a number of farms, mostly where the golf club is now. The tenant farmers would have rented land and accommodation from the family. The farm land within the estate walls would have certainly been reserved for the landowner's prize cattle and sheep, so he could show them off to visitors. Estate owners would often take on the role of hobby farmer keeping the best land for themselves. Both the Hills and the Batesons were interested in the agricultural improvement of the estate while the latter even encouraged the tenants by offering prizes for farming achievements.

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The Ha-ha

The Hill family would not have wanted the farm animals to wander into their gardens and lawns so they built a ditch which runs along the boundary of the golf club which could possibly have been a "ha-ha". This is a type of ditch which was very fashionable in the 18th century. They kept the farm animals off the area round the house without obstructing the view. This maintained the perception the landowner wanted to create; a rural idyllic garden of Eden. While the local peasantry was struggling in squalor the views from the estate house would be one of tranquillity befitting someone of that stature.

You can see from the diagram below how the ha-ha was constructed and how it worked.



Former farmlands

Ha-ha (ditch)

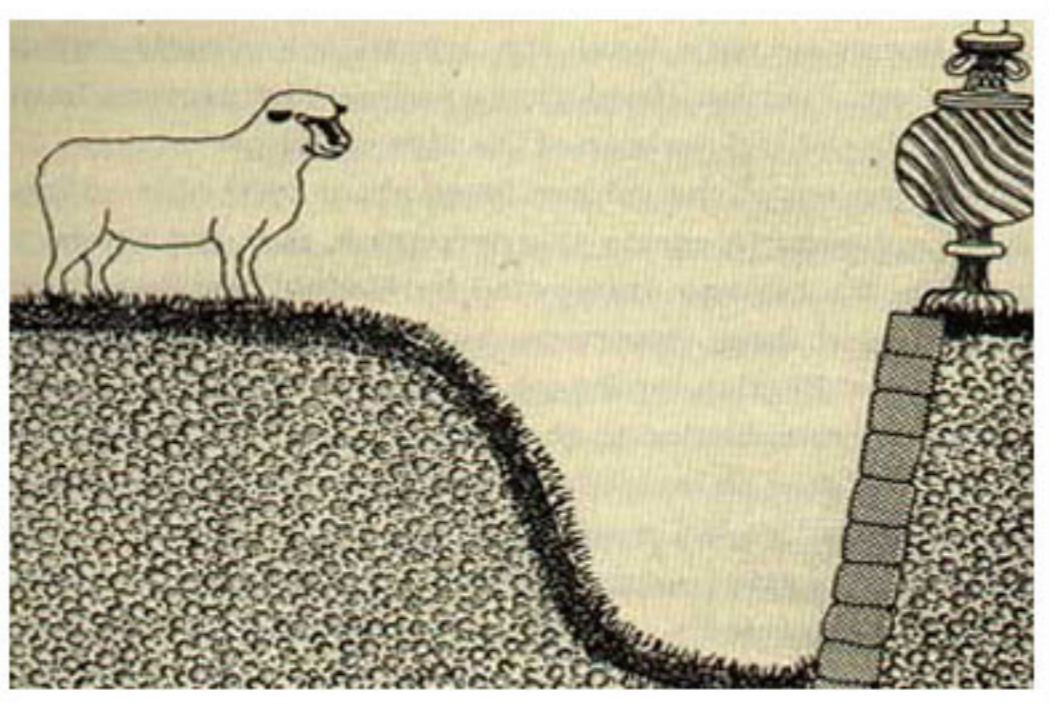


Diagram of a ha-ha: You can see how the ditch was dug out and then reinforced with bricks. One explanation for the name is thought to be it was the sound made by somebody falling into it.

The Deramore Oak

The Deramore Oak was the most famous tree in Belvoir. It was thought to be the largest oak in Ireland and in the late 19th century it had a girth of over thirty feet and would have been hundreds of years old. "Deramore" is Irish for "Great Oak" and it was so impressive that when Thomas Bateson became a lord and had to choose a name for him-self, the name he chose was "Deramore". Today Belvoir Park Forest has the oldest known oaks in Ireland with some dating back to the mid 1600's. The age of these trees shows us that there has been extensive land management in the area for a considerable time, as only a few of these very old trees survive so there must have been timber production going on here before the old oaks had started to grow. Using ancient trees in this way is another piece to the puzzle when looking at how the land was used and the structure of the landscape. Lagan Valley Regional Park is involved with conserving the genetics of these trees through acorn collection and planting as well as helping conserve the trees themselves.



Above: The Deramore Oak

Right: Belvoir Primary School pupils planting young oaks grown from the acorns of Belvoir's ancient trees

