

## The Hill family

The House of Downshire, the most powerful of the planter families in Co Down, owed much to its founder Sir Moyses Hill, but his successors added significantly to the family properties. Much of the land acquired by the Hills had formerly belonged to the Irish Magennises. The main seat of the Hill family lay at Hillsborough, although they had earlier resided at Stranmillis and Hillhall, hence the names. In the early 18th century the younger branch of the Hills acquired the townlands of Ballylenaghan, Bredagh and Galwally. In 1722 Arthur Hill, second son of Michael Hill of Hillsborough, paid £2,000 to the Ward family for Ballylenaghan. Arthur Hill administered his estate from Belvoir until his death in 1771; he was buried in the family vault in Belvoir cemetery. The Hill family was the family who built Belvoir and was most closely linked with the estate. Moyses Hill was the founder of the "dynasty". He built forts on the River Lagan and later residences at Hillhall and Hillsborough, hence the names.

In 1690 Michael Hill married Anne Trevor who was a very rich lady in her own right. Their eldest son Trevor inherited the Hill properties.

## Building the house

The name "Belvoir" was possibly given by Viscountess Middleton, Arthur Hill's mother. It may be short for "belle voir" or "beautiful view" and could be named after Belvoir Castle near Grantham in Lincolnshire where she spent many happy days of her childhood. Arthur was her favourite son and she created Belvoir with him, the work done as a partnership. However she died in 1747 before the house was finished.

The whole family, and particularly Arthur, was very rich and powerful. They were also very active in politics and in fact Arthur Hill was Chancellor of the Exchequer for a year and a member of several committees.

In 1759 Arthur's Uncle John Trevor died and left him an estate in Wales. He then became Arthur Hill-Trevor. In 1765 he was made the first Viscount Dungannon.

## The Duke of Wellington

The famous Duke of Wellington had close links with Belvoir. His mother Anne Hill who married the Earl of Mornington in 1759 was the daughter of Arthur 1st Viscount Dungannon. As a girl she lived in the newly built Belvoir House and later in life at nearby Annadale.



*Duke of Wellington*

## The end of the Hill family at Belvoir

When Arthur Hill-Trevor died in 1771 the estate should have been passed down to his eldest son but he had died in 1770 so it went to his grandson who was only eight years old. He became the second Viscount Dungannon at the age of 8. From this time on the Hill-Trevor family only stayed in the house occasional.

## The Grand Finale

The eighteenth century was an age of great parties and the parties in Belvoir would have been no exception. The "Twelfth Night" was on the 12th day after Christmas and was traditionally a big party night. In 1788 Viscount Dungannon, by now 25, held a grand fancy dress party. This was the last party that the Hill family held in Belvoir, but one that was well received and talked about in local press.