

The Village of Newtownbreda

Belvoir is in the district of Newtownbreda, or as it was known earlier, Bredagh. It gets its name from the Kinel-Bredach a tribe who settled here in the 5th century after migrating from Leinster.

The old village of Breda was probably close to the medieval church, and just outside the wall that surrounded the estate the Hills at Belvoir created. It is said that the foundations of both the old wall and village can still be found beneath the brushwood and undergrowth near the old cemetery and Yew trees.

The new village of New Town Breda was moved in the middle of the 18th century to the site it still occupies today. Arthur Hill-Trevor, in the manner of other aristocrats of the time, extended his demesne. As a consequence the old village of Breda had to be moved outside the new demesne wall to the present site of Newtownbreda.



Possible Site of old Bredagh Village

The Parish Church of Knockbreda

In medieval times there were two churches in the parishes of Knock and Breda. The one at Breda was close to the old cemetery in Belvoir. The first record of it was in 1442 but it is possible that it was build earlier. By 1662 it lay in ruins.

The parishes were united by Oliver Cromwell in

1657 to form Knockbreda. By the early 1700s the Church of Breda was in ruins, and although the old Knock Church had been repaired, it was unsuitable for worship. A new church had to be built but the decision had to be made about where it was to be built and where the money would come from.

Ann Trevor (Lady Middleton) was responsible for building Knockbreda Parish Church in 1737 at her own expense, but stipulated it must be situated at Breda, which became part of the new village of Newtownbreda.



The present Knockbreda Parish Church

The Nailers of Newtownbreda

Before the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th/early 19th century, there were no large factories or mills so most people worked in agriculture or in "cottage" industries such as spinning flax and weaving linen. In Newtownbreda the biggest cottage industry was the production of nails. All that was needed was a small hearth and bellows for heating the iron rods, and anvil and a hammer. Men, women and children made a living by making nails. By the 1840s, hand forged nails were being ousted by machine cut or punched ones which were faster and cheaper to produce.

"A well known Belfast merchant, in the beginning of this century, was in the habit of exporting various goods to a port in Spain, where they

were sold by an agent. The goods were usually provisions, but sometimes the cargo was made up of linens and other commodities. As was customary, the agent, in sending back his Account of Sales, always made several deductions, such as breakages, damage by sea water etc; but one invariable item was "Eaten by the Rats". It happened on one occasion that the Belfast merchant sent out a large quantity of nails, which were then made at Newtownbreda. In due time the Account of Sales arrived from Spain and to his great astonishment, a deduction was made as usual for "Eaten by the Rats!"

[A local anecdote collected by Robert S McAdam about the Nailers of Newtownbreda; The McAdam Manuscript 1872]

traditionally planted in churchyards and graveyards and these would have formed an avenue leading to the graveyard. For centuries the yew has had a special significance for man through religion, folklore, medicine and warfare. In ancient times the yew played an important part in the rituals of many cultures including Ireland. This evergreen tree, ingrained in pre-Christian mysteries of death and rebirth, still stands in churchyards of Britain as a powerful symbol of resurrection.

[Source: Forest Service; Belvoir Park Forest – A Background History]

The Graveyard and Mausoleum

The graveyard at Newtownbreda and Hill family mausoleum goes back to medieval times and would have been associated with Breda church. Parts of the wall date back to medieval times.



Members of the Hill family were buried here and the site includes their mausoleum. There were burials still taking place until the 1920s but after this period several gravestones had been removed and the graveyard was not well maintained. More recently the entire site and many of the graves were vandalised with the vault of the Dungannon family raided for the lead coffins.

There are two lines of yew trees that run in parallel along the boundary of the present golf course and Belvoir Park. The yews were