

The Plantation

Elizabeth I tried to reintroduce English rule into eastern Ulster. The O'Neill's lands were confiscated after they rose in rebellion and were granted to Sir Thomas Smith, but he was unable to subdue his Irish tenants and this plantation failed.

In the reign of James I an indenture of 30 April 1605 divided the whole of the North Down and Ards between the now pardoned Con O'Neill and 2 Scottish adventurers, Hugh Montgomery and James Hamilton.

The extent of the O'Neill inheritance was very considerable, since the one-third left to Con stretched from the River Lagan at Lambeg to Belfast, thence to Holywood from where it projected in a south easterly direction for about 8 miles. The centre was at Castlereagh and included those townlands which today lie on the southern and eastern outskirts of Belfast – Ballynebredagh (Breda), Ballynefeigh, (Ballynafeigh), Ballyknockollmuckill (Knock), Ballylisnebrenny (Lisnebrenny), Bally McCarritt (Ballymacarrett), Ballycrevine, Ballyrsoboye, Ballygalwally (Galwally), Ballycregogie (Cregagh), Ballycastleoghe (Castlereagh).

Con however did not retain his lands for very long. His debts increased enormously and by 1616 he was forced to sell almost all his portion to meet his liabilities. Hamilton and Montgomery were not the only

adventurers to profit from Con's plight. Colonel Moses Hill, a very able and ambitious officer of Chichester, acquired land at Carrickfergus and leased Islandmagee from the Lord Deputy. After this he bought some of Con's lands in Castlereagh and created "a brave plantation" of many Lancashire and Cheshire men in the fertile Lagan Valley.

The Chancery Inquisition of 13 October 1623

The Chancery Inquisition of 13 October 1623 contained legal documents dealing with the estates of Con O'Neill, James Hamilton, Hugh Montgomery and Moyses Hill; indentures and deeds drawn up to legalise the grants made by Con O'Neill to the planters, in the period 1605-23, and the land settlements made between the settlers themselves. The original Inquisition was destroyed in the fire at the Dublin Four Courts in 1922, but a copy was made and preserved in the late 17th century and probably came into the possession of the Ward family of Bangor. In the copy Inquisition marginal notes were made about points of particular significance in the text. The 2 extracts refer to leases of the townlands of Breda and Galwally, and Ballynafeigh. In one Con O'Neill leased to Michael White the lands of Breda and Galwally for 21 years; in the other Thomas Hibbotts of Carrickfergus Esquire, who has acquired in 1608 from Con O'Neill the townland of Ballynafeigh, gave a woodcutting lease of the same townland for 41 years to Walter Hillman, burgess and tanner of Carrickfergus and John Spencer a carpenter

The Dungannons of Belvoir

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. 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.

Arthur Hill took the name of Hill-Trevor when he inherited the Trevor property at Brynkinalt, Denbighshire, Wales from his father's half brother Marcus Hill, who died in 1751. Arthur Hill-Trevor was created in 1765 the first Viscount Dungannon (second creation). The mother of Arthur Hill-Trevor was Ann Trevor, whose father was Sir John Trevor of Brynkinalt, Denbighshire a cousin of the notorious Judge Jeffreys. Ann married secondly Alan Brodrick, Viscount Midleton and was largely instrumental in having the parish church of Knockbreda built in Bredagh in 1737.

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 Hall. In 1809 the Dungannons sold to 3 Belfast merchants, John Gillies, Robert Davis, and William Blacker for £35,000 "the Mansion House and Demesne of Belvoir together with the Out or Back Farm in which was comprised all the lands of Ballylenaghan otherwise Belvoir, Bredagh and Galwally and also the Pew or Seat belonging to the said Viscount Dungannon in the Church of Newtown Bredagh".

The Batesons of Belvoir

In 1809, Arthur, second Viscount Dungannon, sold part of his Belvoir Estate to 3 merchants, John Gillies, William Blacker and Robert Davis. When John Gillies became a bankrupt in 1811, Robert Davis purchased his part of the Belvoir Estate for £13,000. Late in the same year Robert Bateson of Orangefield bought the house and lands of Belvoir in possession of Blacker and Davis for £24,000 subject to a mortgage debt of £15,000 and the interest on it. On 8 July 1818 the second Viscount Dungannon sold the remainder of Belvoir Park and lands to Robert Bateson.

The Batesons came to Ulster from Yorkshire. One branch of the family established itself at Orangefield in the early 18th Century. Thomas Bateson, father of Robert who became the owner of the Belvoir Estates, died at Orangefield in 1811. Robert Bateson, founder of the house of Deramore, was born in 1782 and died in 1863. He was created a Baronet in 1818. His eldest son, Robert, was an MP for Co Londonderry and died at Jerusalem, aged 27, on

24 December 1847; his second son, Thomas was born on 4 June 1819, he was raised to the peerage as Baron Deramore in 1885 after 34 years of service in Parliament and died on 1 December 1890.

The Batesons figured prominently in the 19th century Irish Political life, and on occasions made notable contributions in support of the Conservative cause in Co Down. Sir Robert Bateson's role and influence in the 1852 election for the 2 Co Down seats were particularly significant and decisive. Sir Robert Bateson was one of the larger landed proprietors in Co Down, and in 1852 the political power of the gentry was quite considerable. At that time Sir Robert owned 7,201 statute acres, with a valuation of £7,358 and there were 147 tenants on his lands with the necessary qualification for voting (there were about 10,000 votes in Co Down in 1852).

The Final Years of Belvoir Estate

The Batesons or Deramores, as they become known after taking the title in 1885, lived at Belvoir until the latter years of the 19th century when Walter H Wilson took up residence. He was a ship builder and a partner of Harland and Wolff's.

The last resident was Sir James Johnston who was Lord Mayor of Belfast in 1917 and 1918. He was married to one of the Gallagher family of the tobacco firm.

After this the house lay vacant for some time until in 1934 the building firm of W J Stewart leased the buildings and land. The intention was to develop the

area for housing but at the start of World War II the Admiralty took over the estate as a temporary armaments depot. For this purpose a total of 131 buildings were erected – mostly Nissan and Elephant huts. They built a wharf on the canal and brought the armaments, torpedoes and large shells for battleships, up by barge from Belfast docks. Army and Navy Personnel occupied the house and buildings.

In 1950 the Admiralty handed the base back to Stewart and Partners who then used it for storing building materials. However in 1955 the Northern Ireland Housing Trust (now the Housing Executive) bought the estate to develop it as a housing project. The Housing Trust being anxious that some of the amenities of the area should be preserved approached the Forest Service with a view to obtaining their co-operation in managing blocks of woodland interspersed among the houses.

Eventually in 1960 the Forest Service agreed to lease 150 acres and to:

- (a) allow the public access to woodland paths especially along the river and
 - (b) to restore the arboretum for public benefit and enjoyment.
- Unfortunately by this time the house had fallen into a bad state of repair and it had to be demolished after standing the tests of time for over 200 years. The demolition was called "Operation Lusty" and on 18th February 1961 the house was blown up. The rubble was used to build the car park where the house had been sited and some of the paths and roads in the area.