

Background to Belvoir Estate

The extensive grounds were laid out before the house was built in gardens, paths, ponds and waterfalls. It was here that the first glasshouse in Belfast was built in 1757. Many trees were planted by the 'Dungannon' 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 nucleus.

Both the Dungannons 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.

Belvoir was well known in Co Down for its shooting and was always well stocked with pheasant. Rarities of the present day like buzzards, locally known as "kites", were reported to have bred here.

Stable, Farm and Outdoor Estate Staff

The Head groom was in charge of everything in the stables and could be considered as the stable manager. With such a dependency on the horse during this period this was an important role within the estate, reasonably well paid compared to other staff members and would have almost certainly come with a apartment within the stable compound. In Belvoir the accommodation for the head groom and his family was directly above the main entrance to the stables. The head groom would not only care for the horses but would often be responsible for the buying and selling of the animals. This was a great responsibility as there would have been considerable amounts of his employer's money involved and a bad purchase or sale would reflect on his capabilities. The feed and bedding for the animals would also have to be acquired. This often came from the estates farm or bought if required; it was the head grooms task to ensure a good price for this as all bills would have been passed onto the owner or steward. The head groom was also expected to have experience and knowledge of animal husbandry so the estate could breed its own horses and veterinary skills.

The coachman was a man whose business it was to drive a coach, a horse-drawn vehicle designed for the conveyance of more than one passenger and covered for protection from the elements. The term "coachman" is correctly applied to the driver of any type of coach, but it had a specialized meaning before the advent of motor vehicles, as the servant who preceded the chauffeur in

domestic service. In the 'big house', this would have been a specialty, but in more modest households, the coachman would have doubled as the stable-hand or groom. In early coaches he sat on a built-in compartment called a boot, bracing his feet on a footrest called a footboard. He would wear a box coat or box jacket, a heavy overcoat with or without shoulder capes, double-breasted, with fitted waist and wide lapels; its name derives from its use by coachmen riding on the box seat, exposed to all kinds of weather. He would also be responsible for maintaining the coaches making repairs himself or commissioning others to carry out the tasks, such as the blacksmith.

Grooms took a more manual role in the horses care. They would have, as the name suggests, groomed the horses as well as catered for each animals needs regarding feeding, exercise and health. The grooms would be experienced men who had probably served as stable hands for a number of years and had been deemed by the head groom as ready for promotion. The grooms in turn would be gaining as much knowledge and experience as possible from the head groom so they could take the next step up the ladder. This was not a well paid job but would have been enough for a married man to live on if his wife was also in some form of employment. Single grooms and stable-hands would often have lived in accommodation at the stables but these would be very basic often a converted stalls beside the horses.

Stable-hands were the most junior of the stable workers doing all the most basic and often unpleasant manual tasks while

also looking after the horses. Stable-hands were generally younger unmarried men who lacked experience but would be trying to impress in order to secure a grooms job. They would also be expected to run errands for the other members of staff such as the coachman or blacksmith.

Blacksmiths were highly regarded and did not fall into the same hierarchy system as the other stable workers. He would have been answerable to the head groom but more as an equal due to his skilful trade. Blacksmiths were always well respected, in many towns and villages smithies were the hub of area.

The blacksmith would not only make and fit horseshoes but a wide variety of tasks. He would make pots and pans, gates, ploughs and other farm implements, fix carriage wheels, bolts, tools and even door knobs. He would often work alone but would take on several apprentices during his working life. Such an important man would have been well paid compared to his peers but it would be for commissioned work rather than a regular wage. The blacksmith may even rent the smithy from the landowner and take work from outside the estate.

A farm manager or factor would not always be present on the estate farm as the landowner would often take on this role as a hobby. The landowner would make all the big decisions regarding money, how he wanted the farm to operate and what he wanted to produce. Often 'hobby farms' would not be run for profit but prestige, a good way to show one's wealth through improvements and quality of livestock. If a farm manager was employed he would take this role

but would have the big decisions sanctioned from above. As manager, the running of the arable crops, beef and dairy herds and sheep flocks would all have to come together under his instruction. He would be responsible for staffing the farm which he had to do carefully because the success or failure of his workers would reflect directly onto him. At certain times of the year the farm manager would have to gather a large work force for short periods, such as harvest time, as farming was still very labour intensive. The rotation of crops and grazing the quality of the animals, buying and selling would ultimately fall to the farm manager, though he did delegate this to his shepherds, cattlemen, and dairymen. They would look after their own herds while the farm manager would oversee the whole operation and ensure the finances were in order to present to the owner. Should a member of his staff not be producing, for example good quality beef cattle for market or show, then the manager would have to replace him with someone else. These decisions would not be easy as staff would usually have houses 'tied' to the job. The manager himself would have one of the better staff houses on the estate and earn a good living, but he too would be evaluated on the performance of the farm depending on the landowner's expectations. There were no contracts or workers rights of any real nature which meant all the staff were at the mercy of those in the 'big house'.

Shepherds were another lone worker on the estate; even if there were several employed they would usually be in charge of a section of the flock. It was part of their job to ensure that the sheep

got enough food and water while other areas did not get overgrazed and other pastures did not grow too long and go wild. He would, during the lambing time, be watching his flock round the clock making sure as many of the births as possible were successful. The lambs were the biggest commodity of the flock followed by the wool. The shepherd would assist and advise the estate owner or manager on which lambs would be best for breeding, ready for market and what was needed to be bought in to improve the flock. He would also be responsible for protecting against predators such as foxes and would have shot, snared or poisoned them if he could. Sheep rustling was also an issue and added an element of danger to the job as the penalty for rustling was severe; those employed in the practice would fight rather than be caught. Shepherds were employed by Lord Deramore to look after his sheep. They would have lived on the estate, usually in one of the outlying cottages to be close to his flock and the estate farm where he would have assisted in more general farm tasks such as the harvest. One of them was named Robert Farr who came from Wiltshire in 1860. He died in 1906 aged 83.

Cattleman was in charge of the estates beef herd, not to be confused with the dairyman. Both would work together but there were distinct differences in their roles and the product of their labours. The cattleman would be in charge of the herd as a whole (including the dairy herd but not in it's day to day running) which would have been under the scrutiny of the estate owner as prize winning cattle was well documented in the local press and would be a source of

competition between landowners. The cattleman over many years would produce bloodlines of breeding cattle, with those calves produced that fell below the standard fattened and sold for beef or to other breeders who could not afford to be so choosy. He would organise the farm workers at his disposal in the production or purchase of winter feed and to maintain good grazing over the summer. As cattleman he would have the responsibility of buying and selling the livestock which would have been a reasonable return for the estate owner. The buying and selling of prize animals would usually be handled by the estate owner as they could fetch prices that were many times the cattleman's annual wages. He would however often broker the deal through the cattlemen from another estate leaving the owners to haggle over the money.

Dairyman as part the farm staff would be in charge of the milking the cows, each animal had to be milked twice a day the first milking done at around four in the morning. The milk parlour duties would have included making sure the milking sheds were kept clean to avoid spoiling the milk, the milk production, and the provision of milk for the estate as well as for market. The dairyman in conjunction with the farm manager, would also be in charge of the herd, his expertise in dairy cattle meant he had the task of husbandry, selecting calves for sale or introduction to the herd, determining when an animal ceased to be of commercial use and needed to be replaced. Due to the nature of his work he would live on the estate in a part of the dairy or in an estate cottage, which would mean he was at hand to help out with other farm duties.

Dairymaids would have assisted with duties included milking the cows by hand and processing the milk. They would either be family members of the estate workers or girls and women from the surrounding area. It was more of a part-time occupation unless they were employed elsewhere on the estate.

Gardeners were employed to maintain the pleasure gardens, though during the early period of Belvoir's creation they would have been given the task of creating the gardens from moorland, bog and forest. The gardeners had to provide fruit, vegetables and flowers for the landowner's house, usually grown within the walled garden or glasshouses. There would be a pressure to produce more exotic plants and foods, especially in the glasshouse. The head gardener and his staff were often expected to reproduce plants they had never heard of in order for the estate owner to have something no-one else had. The head gardener would coordinate the rest of the workforce and be relied upon to keep the gardens in immaculate condition to help create the idyllic yet affluent lifestyle the family enjoyed and wished to convey to others. The head gardener would have had a cottage on the estate, while the gardeners would usually be local people from outside the estate. Kenneth Sutherland was one of the head gardeners in Belvoir during the time of the Batesons.

Gamekeepers were employed to rear mainly birds for shoots that would be held on the estate. These would have been pheasants, turkeys, partridge, ducks and guinea fowl. They would also be responsible for the

control of 'pests' such as rabbits, crows, magpies, foxes and because of the game birds the poisoning of birds of prey such as peregrines and red kites was common. This practice across the country led to the extinction of some species such as the red kite until their reintroduction by the RSPB to Northern Ireland in 2008. The gamekeeper would often live on the estate or close by and was not considered high up the social ladder within the estate staff.

Gatekeepers kept control of who was entering or leaving the estate. They lived in small cottages or "gatekeepers' lodges" at the entrance to the estate. They would not simply sit at the gate and wait for someone to arrive; gatekeepers would also be responsible for the upkeep of the gates and entrances so they were always a good first impression to visitors or those passing by. This was often a part-time job and gatekeepers were often semi-retired or employed as handymen and possibly on the estate farms. Because they lived in the gate lodges it meant someone was always at the entrances, providing a level of security.

Belvoir estate workers got free milk, coals, potatoes and as much as they could take from the orchards.