

Seymour Hill

The Charley's were pioneers in the linen industry and it is said that looms were set up in this house in the 18th century and it was claimed the new process of bleaching linen cloth with chlorine was discovered and first used here.

For over 200 hundred years, members of the Charley Family lived in the Dunmurry area. They had a number of properties in the area, the first recorded house being Finaghy House when Ralph Charley (1674 - 1756), a successful merchant of Belfast, purchased Ballyfinaghy in 1727. It was an imposing mansion in a large park with extensive outhouses and stables. It had six reception rooms and twelve bedrooms with dressing rooms, a remarkable feature being a revolving fireplace between the drawing room and the dining room. The Charley family armorial bearings were built into the outside gables and on a landing, half way up the wide oak banister stairs. The Coat of Arms is still engraved on the landing window. At the time of the house sale in 1885 one of the conditions of sale was that if the house was demolished the Coat of Arms was to be restored to the Charley family. Five generations of the family lived at Finaghy until shortly after John Stoupe Charley (1825 - 1878) died. Finaghy House is now known as Faith House, a comfortable home for senior citizens in the middle of a large housing estate.

The Charley family occupied Seymour Hill from 1822 until 1946. In 1820, William Charley purchased and remodelled the bleach green at Dunmurry and the nearby Mossvale works. In 1822, he bought Seymour Hill House. Three generations of the family lived there.

William's father John had served his time in the linen trade under Richard Wolfenden (1723 - 1775) of Harmony Hill in Lambeg, head of one of the earliest linen trade families in Ulster. In 1783, John Charley married Richard Wolfenden's daughter Anne Jane (1758 - 1818) and it seems that the Wolfenden linen business passed to John

transferred it to Seymour Hill. In 1824, William entered into partnership with his eldest brother John to found the linen firm of I & W Charley & Co. By 1837, it was regarded to be among the premier bleach greens in the country turning out between 20,000 and 25,000 pieces (linen) every year. The produce was of a particularly high quality and for many years the normal present from Northern Ireland to any member of the Royal Family when they married were linen sheets from J & W Charley, specially embroidered with the relevant royal cypher.

Seymour Hill stands on a hill with a wide view of the Lagan Valley. The Charley estate on both sides of the River Lagan in counties Antrim and Down amounted to over four hundred acres. They were tenants of the Marquess of Hereford who owned all the land from Dunmurry to the southern shore of Lough Neagh. Seymour Hill was named after the Marquis of Hereford's surname (Seymour). In the 1880's Irish Land Acts, the Charley family assumed full possession of the lands.

The house had four floors - the basement below ground level had extensive kitchens, scullery, larder, pantries, dairy rooms, wine cellars and a large servants' hall. On the ground floor, the entrance hall had suits of armour standing in front of painted mural walls and there was a grandfather clock with the name William Charley in place of the numerals. To the left of the front door was the dining room, which contained the large family portraits. Behind the dining room were the cloakroom, gunroom and butler's pantry. To the right was the drawing room and, behind it, a comfortable morning room and library.

On the first floor were the main bedrooms, dressing rooms and bathroom. The bedrooms contained four poster beds and double doors from the rooms to the landing, which cut out most of the noise from the landing passages. On the top floor were the day and night nurseries for the younger members of the family and the staff sleeping

quarters.

Water was pumped from a well in the centre of a large paddock in front of the house. There was a large wheel at the back door, which had to be turned from time to time to pump water up to the roof tank. There was stabling for 12 horses in the yard.

A head gardener and five or six under gardeners maintained a large walled garden and grounds. Old box edgings and stones from the Giant's Causeway gave it an unusual character. Outside the walled garden was the Yew Tree Walk, which led from the house down to the front drive entrance. Between the house and walled garden were lawns with landscaped trees and shrubs. Near the rock garden was the dogs' cemetery, all with their individual headstones. There were front and back avenues, the front drive entering via gates with a gate lodge. In spring, this avenue had daffodils all along the border from gate to the main house.

Within the grounds of Seymour Hill there was a lake and a waterfall leading into a fishpond. The Derriaghy River flowed under the main Belfast to Lisburn road to the lake and then divided into two millraces to work the factory water wheels.

During World War II, the laundry premises in the upper yard were occupied by up to 100 women and children evacuated from the centre of Belfast during the air raid blitzes of 1941 and 1942.

Just after World War II, the Northern Ireland Housing Trust was formed and, by the first vesting order issued in Northern Ireland, the family was compelled to sell Seymour Hill House and all the grounds on the county Antrim side of the river Lagan. This was the first enterprise undertaken by the Trust, now the NI Housing Executive. In no time, the house was surrounded by a well laid out but vast housing estate. In 1986, the house was vandalised and badly damaged by firebombs. It was feared it might have to be pulled down but the

Housing Executive transferred the listed building and part of the grounds to Belfast Improved Housing Association Ltd, which has now restored the building for domestic housing. The Charley family vaults are in Drumbeg Church.



Chrome Hill

The Wolfenden family came to settle here in the late 17th century when they bought a bleach green at Lambeg. They built the house, originally named Lambeg House, beside the old road and close to the ford on the Lagan. There is a claim that King William, on his way south to the Boyne in 1690, was entertained in that house while awaiting the repair of his carriage, which was damaged on crossing the ford. Wolfenden's Bridge now stands where the old ford crossing was.

The family linen business prospered in the 18th century and expanded to include the manufacture of blankets and paper, on another site beside the Lagan, about 1750. In 1825, the business, which by then included the manufacture of cotton, calico and muslin, was relocated to Dublin and at some time in the early 1830s, Lambeg House was sold.

The house and business at Lambeg were bought by Richard Niven of Manchester who had discovered the use of bichromates for the fixing of colours in the textile printing process. Niven renamed the house Chrome Hill to commemorate that discovery.