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## **BELVOIR PARK FOREST AND EDUCATION CENTRE**

Belvoir Park Forest was opened in 1961 and covers 74.8 hectares (179.5 acres) along the south bank of the River Lagan. It is the headquarters of the North Down Management Group of forests which includes Hillsborough, Purdysburn, Creighton's Green, Ballysallagh, Cairnwood, Helen's Tower, Portavoe and Mount Stewart. Although a small forest Belvoir contains not only a wide range of forest tree species managed under commercial forestry conditions, and an arboretum, but also recreational facilities which include a car park, walks, and a caravan site as well as a conservation area for the management of wildlife. There are also several features of historic interest – a very old graveyard, a Norman motte and old estate buildings. In this way Belvoir becomes a microcosm of forestry in Northern Ireland – a varied forest environment together with physical evidence of land use down through the ages – and as such becomes a unique centre for educational pursuits. To make full use of this the Forest Service offers schools and other organised bodies a 50 seat lecture room equipped with visual aids, an exhibit which portrays all the aspects of Belvoir and an educational trail through the forest.

### **ROBINSON GOLD**

Belvoir Park Forest can be proud of the fact that a unique tree was discovered here in 1962. It happened like this; Mr George Robinson, the Forest Service Supervisor at Belvoir was clearing undergrowth when he noticed a small seedling, 2 to 3 inches high, growing amongst the weeds. He was attracted to it by its unusual golden colour so he dug it out and took it home. After 2 years in a flower pot at his back door he transplanted it to its present position. It was subsequently identified as a natural cross between *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* "Lutea", Nootka Cypress and *Cupressus macrocarpa*, Monterey Cypress and is now known as *X Cupressocyparis leylandii* "Robinson Gold". Its golden foliage can be seen to best effect during the spring and autumn. While its method of reproduction – by cuttings – limits its importance as a forest tree, its rapid growth, attractive colouring and compact pyramidal habit, make it ideal for ornamental planting. It is now sold commercially worldwide by the nursery trade.

This tree has been chosen to represent the District of Castlereagh as a plant unique to the area and appears in the Coat of Arms of the District Council as well as in the centre of the Medallion on the Mayor's chain.

### **HOGWEED**

The Giant Hogweed or Cartwheel flower (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is quite common in Belvoir. The plant comes from the Caucasus Mountains in South East Europe and can grow up to 5m high.

It has been known for some time that if the plant is handled it can cause a very nasty skin rash. But it has been recently discovered by the Botanical Society of the British Isles that the rash only occurs if the sap of the plant contacts the skin during sunny days in mid-summer. This rash is caused by certain compounds contained in the sap which make the skin sensitive to ultra violet light of a particular wavelength. This type of light only occurs around mid-summer and especially in July. The combination of the sap and the light produce what is really exaggerated sunburn.

## **MEDIEVAL TIMES**

The district in which Belvoir is situated, Newtownbreda, or as it was known earlier, Bredagh, gets its name from the Kinel-Bredach a tribe who settled here in the 5<sup>th</sup> century after migrating from Leinster.

The Anglo-Norman invasion of Ulster began in 1177 when John de Courcy led a private venture of 22 knights and about 300 soldiers north from Dublin and defeated an Irish chieftain named Mac Dunleavy at Downpatrick. His military successes enabled him to occupy most of the lands which today comprise Co Down and South Antrim, and he rewarded his knights with manors defended by mottes and castles. Unlike English medieval barons, the Ulster Anglo-Normans were not lords of demesnes and villages, but lived off rents they exacted from tenants in dispersed settlements.

De Courcy had to secure his hold on the land quickly and effectively. He built 2 great stone fortresses at Carrickfergus and Dundrum and his lords erected hurriedly other castles of earth and timber, which had mottes and palisades, trenches and wooden archery towers and in some places baileys.

The Anglo-Normans were secure in East Down and South Antrim in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries with the smaller private mottes concentrated in these areas. The situation was different in West Down, where castles like Dromore and Ballyroney were military establishments along a hostile frontier, having garrisons of around 40 soldiers, and acting as outposts to protect the more settled districts of the east.

Belvoir was one of these private mottes, which were built to back up the Anglo-Norman conquest of East Ulster, and to provide a curtain or shield of protection around Carrickfergus. Belvoir motte was probably abandoned when Anglo-Norman power in Ulster declined in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Edward Bruce incursion into Ulster 1315-18 devastated the insecure earldom of Ulster, and there followed a long period of gradual decline, until the Anglo-Norman settlements shrank to mere footholds in the Ards and around Carrickfergus. By 1430 the Irish Clann Aedha Buidhe O'Neill commonly known as the Clanaboye O'Neills had occupied most of North Down and South Antrim. Anglo-Norman Ulster always was frontier territory, vulnerable to Irish attacks and liable to collapse under external pressures.

## **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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 AND 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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".

### **MRS DELANEY'S LETTERS**

Mrs Delaney, wife of Dean Delaney of Mount Panther, Dundrum, Co Down was a well known 18<sup>th</sup> century diarist. Her letters paint a vivid picture of every day life in that period, particularly her comments on the people she met. In the extracts she is writing about a visit to Belvoir and the Hill family. The Miss Hill mentioned, who becomes Lady Mornington, is the mother of the Duke of Wellington.

### **LETTERS FROM MRS DELANEY**

#### **BELVOIR, 1 OCTOBER 1758**

"....At one o'clock we took our leave with a promise of calling there on our return; Mr Bayly went home, and we came to this place about three o'clock, and this is indeed a charming place; a very good house, though not quite finished, and everything very elegant. Mr Hill is a sort of old beau, who has lived much in the world; his fortune is a very good one. He is an original, and entertains Sally and me excessively. A fine gentleman is the character he aims at, but in reality he is a very honest, hospitable, friendly, good man, with a little pepper in his composition, that puts me often in mind of Mr Achard: but he has the advantage of seeing his own peevishness and making a joke of it himself. Nothing can be more obliging than his behaviour is to us, as well as Mrs Hill's, who is a well behaved, good humoured woman; her eldest daughter; about 16 – a fine young woman altogether; rather a little clumsy, but fine complexion, teeth and nails with a great deal of modesty and good humour. Two other daughters: the youngest of which very plain indeed, almost ten years old; the other not pretty, but lively and natural and very civil. They are all the morning employed in their exercises; the afternoons they spend with us. They have a pretty civilised gentlewoman, who is their governess – I think such a one as you would like; but she is on the footing of a companion, which is a troublesome thing. I say nothing of the eldest son – he is a mere Cymon.

This place is much more furnished than Hillsborough, and in a finer country, and much enriched with bleach yards, farm houses and pretty dwellings. On Friday we went in a boat on the river, which runs round the improvements almost, and several turnings of it can be seen from the house. The grounds are laid out in enclosures, which with the hedgerows and woods on the sides of some of the hills make the prospect very rich. The town of Belfast, Cavehill and the bridge of 22 arches over the river, in a very clear day can be seen from the windows.

But I must come back to Friday and the river, the banks of which are delightful, and I had the curiosity and courage to go through a lock! though I was assured that there was no danger in it, for Mr Hill and all their family go almost every day for pleasure.

The Dean preached today at Mr Hill's church; we have now above 3 score miles to the Giant's Causeway, but the weather promises well for us, and we have had so many invitations from the Dean's old friends, that we might have a baiting place every 10 miles. From hence we go on Tuesday next to a Dr Leslie's, which will be a long day's journey; but Mr Hill lends us his horses for 12 miles and ours are to be sent there the night before. ....Miss Hill has given me a few shells, but nothing rare; she also makes shell flowers, and I have all from her that is not fit for use".

#### **DELVILLE, 27 JANUARY 1759**

"I am amazed you did not know that Lord Mornington had made his addresses to Lady Louisa Lenox, young Lady Kildare's sister, a pretty girl about 16. He was well received, and much encouraged by all the family, and no appearance of dislike in the young lady; but before an answer was positively given, Mr Connolly, with double his fortune, (and perhaps about half his merit), offered himself, and was accepted; the answer to Lord Mornington was, that "the young lady had an unsurmountable dislike to him". However, his heart had no great part in the affair, he liked her, and the alliance. If any wound was made, Miss Hill has cured it by making a deeper one; settlements are drawing up and the clothes bought, and the whole family as happy as truly they have reason to be. She is the eldest daughter to Mr Hill of Belvoir, at whose house we were in on our way to the Giant's Causeway, she has £6,000, and the family estate settled on her in case her brother has no children; Lord Mornington settles £1,400 a year jointure on her, with £500 a year pin money; his estate is now £8,000 a year, and it will be £10,000 in 2 or 3 years more."

#### **DELVILLE, 3 FEBRUARY 1759**

"Lord Mornington was at the play, and looked as solemn as one should suppose the young lady he is engaged to would have done! They are to be married next Tuesday. When the great invitations are over they shall have a quiet one at Delville; Lord Mornington has acted very generously on the occasion. When he made his proposal Mr Hill told him he did him and his daughter a great deal of honour, but that he could not pretend to give his daughter a fortune anyway suitable to his Lordship's estate without injuring his other daughters:

Lord Mornington said that he did not desire any fortune, but would settle £1,600 a year jointure on Miss Hill, and £500 a year pin money; and if she had any fortune, desired it might be laid out in jewels for her. I hope she will prove deserving of this pretty behaviour and make him happy; he is a very good young man on the whole; but where is the perfect creature?"

### **DELVILLE, 10 MARCH 1759**

“Lord Mornington seems very happy as well as his Lady, a pair of good humoured young things, but I think her education not finished enough for her to make any considerable figure, nor her judgement sufficient to get the better of some disadvantages he has had in his education.”

### **DELVILLE, 17 MARCH 1759**

“Miss Mary Hamilton is still with me; she is a sort of girl you would like extremely; she is very sensible, extremely lively and modest, with a great deal of Mary’s drollery. I am sorry Lord Mornington did not fix her instead of where he has done – there is no comparison in the good sense and clever education of one to what the other has had; but these things are ordered all for the best, though they may not appear to our short sight.”

### **DELVILLE, 14 APRIL 1759**

“I believe Mrs Hill has been very careful in the common way of the education of her daughters; they are in very good order, and civil. What I think LM may be wanting in, is what few people have attained at her age, who have not some real superiority of understanding, and little experience of the manner of the world; nor could she learn from her mother that politeness of behaviour and address, which is not only just but right. She is pretty, excessively good natured, and happy in her present situation; but I own I think my godson required a wife that knew more the punctilios of good breeding as he is much wanting in them himself, and those things should not be wanting to men of rank and fortune; indeed I carry it further, and I think that nobody can do so much good in the world who is not well bred as those that are! In truth it is only a modern phrase (according to the notion of that virtue) for that “charity” emphatically expressed by St Paul. Yet refining is of little use, where the wife is only considered as a head servant in the family, and honoured with the head of the table, only that she may have all the troubles of carving, as well as the care of supplying that table, so that her Lord may not descend to any domestic drudgery. Our Maker creates us “helps meet”, which surely implies we are worthy of being their companions, their friends, their advisers, as well as they ours; without these privileges being our due, how could obedience to their will be a punishment? Our servants are not punished by being obedient to our will?”

### **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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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).

In this election the Conservatives were in danger of losing one of the 2 County seats, since Charles William, Third Marquis of Londonderry insisted on putting forward his own candidate, John Vandeleur Stewart, in addition to 2 other Conservative nominees David Ker and Lord Edwin Hill. Lord Londonderry had originally given his support to David Ker but disputes arose between them and a bitter and acrimonious quarrel ensued. Although Ker's position was not made explicit, he was expected to gain a good deal of support from the gentry of down, and such a split in the landed and Conservative interest would only have benefited the radical tenant-right candidate, Sharman Crawford, who might well gain one of the 2 seats.

Many of the landed gentry, especially Lord Downshire, became so concerned with the political dangers to their interests they requested Sir Robert Bateson to go on a personal mission to London to try to dissuade Lord Londonderry (who shared the political patronage of Co Down with the Downshires) from continuing with his fratricidal political plan of nominating and supporting his candidate, J V Stewart, so that he could retain the "family seat". This commission illustrates well the political prestige in diplomatic skills of Sir Robert Bateson.

Sir Robert had to act in a shrewd and sensitive manner in what must have been a delicate and difficult situation, for Lord Londonderry was a temperamental and, at times unreasonable and irascible old man and Vandeleur Stewart was very obdurate. For a fortnight in May 1852 Sir Robert stayed at the Carlton Club, London and had several meetings with both Lord Londonderry and Vandeleur Stewart. Success for his mission was only achieved after very difficult, protracted and awkward negotiations and forceful arguments. In the end Lord Londonderry only agreed to withdraw Stewart as a candidate, if he and Stewart received a sufficiently flattering, courteous and politely worded address from his friends in Co Down requesting him to do so.

The influential landowners of Co Down appreciated the contribution of Sir Robert Bateson in this episode. Lord Downshire wrote to J W Maxwell on 16 May 1852 "Sir Robert has done the trick, and after a long interview yesterday both in the morning and after dinner, Lord Londonderry and Stewart said that, if the representation numerously signed by the County was sent to him, calling on him to resign, he would do so (a somewhat premature

judgement)". Later, on 10 June 1852 Lord Downshire, writing from Ems, Duchy of Nassau to Maxwell includes this sentence in his letter, "The country is very much indebted to you for all the trouble you have taken, and Sir Robert Bateson for the happy termination of the late feud".

## **THE PARISH CHURCH OF KNOCKBREDA**

In 1306 there were 2 medieval churches in the parishes of Knock and Breda; the one at Breda was close to the old cemetery in Belvoir. The 2 parishes were united by Oliver Cromwell in 1657 to form Knockbreda.

By 1773 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 where was it to be sited and how was the money to be raised?

Lady Midleton offered to build the new church at her own expense, but stipulated it must be situated at Breda. Opposition came from Margaret, Viscountess Ikerrin of Castlehill and Charles Ecklin who wanted the new church to be at Knock.

Lady Midleton's offer was accepted; firstly by the Vestry Meeting at Knock which voted overwhelmingly for the "removal of the Knock Church to the townland of Breda"; and secondly by Bishop Francis Hutchinson and the Irish Primate.

Her second son, Arthur Hill-Trevor gave an acre of land in the townland of Breda on which to build the church, which was erected in 1737 to a design attributed to Richard Cassels who it is thought designed the original house at Belvoir.

## **THE VILLAGE OF NEWTOWNBREDA**

The old village of Breda was probably close to the medieval church, and just outside the wall that surrounded the smaller and inner park of the Hills at Belvoir. It is said that the foundations of both the old wall and village can still be traced 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 18<sup>th</sup> century to the site it still occupies today. Arthur Hill-Trevor, in the manner of other aristocrats of the time, extended his demesne to the turnpike road that went from Belfast to Lisburn via Mountpottinger, Ravenhill and Church Road, where remnants of the Dungannon demesne wall can be seen. As a consequence the old village of Breda had to be moved outside the new demesne wall to the present site of Newtownbreda.

## **TITHE APLOTMENT BOOKS AND VALUATION RECORDS**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century most occupiers of land and buildings had to pay a number of ‘taxes’ on their property. The established church collected tithes to supplement the income of their clergymen and the Government put a value or “valuation” on property to raise money, today known as rates, to pay for public services.

The Tithe Applotment Books gave the names of the people who paid tithes about 1830, the quantity of the land in their holdings and the amount of the tithes paid. There are no maps linked with the tithe manuscript books.

In 1824 Parliament decided that a completely new and fair valuation was necessary and that maps as well as valuation lists of property should be produced. The maps were to be prepared for the Board of Ordnance of the Army by the Royal Engineers – hence the name given as the “Ordnance Survey”. Two major valuations were done in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; firstly in the 1830s and later in the 1860s.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century valuation records include maps, field books and printed documents.

The 1830 valuation consists of 500 field books with accompanying maps. The valuers, working in teams of 3, surveyed and valued urban and agricultural land and buildings. Towns were divided into small villages of 30 to 150 houses, large villages or market towns of 150 to 700 houses and large market towns of 700 to 1,000 houses.

As values of buildings were determined by cubic content detailed measurements of houses and outbuildings are given in the field books. Also recorded were their age, nature, quality, state of repair and local circumstances. One-third of the value was then deducted before the final amount was calculated.

## **THE NAILERS OF NEWTOWNBRED A**

Being a small village in a rural area Newtownbreda had no large industry to give employment to its inhabitants. However prior to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a huge market for nails both at home and abroad. The production of nails was an ideal cottage industry as the equipment was simple; a small hearth and bellows for heating the iron rods, and anvil and a hammer. Many of the inhabitants of Newtownbreda – men, women and children – turned to the making of nails as a livelihood. By the 1840s, hand forged nails were being ousted by machine cut or punched ones so this small industry perished in the path of the Industrial Revolution.

## **A LOCAL ANECDOTE COLLECTED BY ROBERT S McADAM REFERRING TO THE NAILERS OF NEWTOWNBRED A**

“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"!"

The McAdam Manuscript 1872.

## **MEMORIES – MISS BYERS' STOREY**

Miss Mary Byers has lived all her life in either Newtownbreda or on the Belvoir Estate. Her father was the Head Game Keeper at Belvoir – a title she says, which did not carry much weight! He worked first for the Wilsons, who took over from the Deramores, and then for Sir James Johnston the last resident of the big house.

Her father came from Mount Stewart, near Newtownards, and had worked at Clandeboye before coming a Game Keeper at Belvoir. When he came here at first he lived with some of the other estate workers in a hut at the back entrance. Later he moved to the bothy above the main entrance to the stables. (This would have been where the main entrance staircase to the exhibit is today.)

He married Sarah McVeigh whose father, James McVeigh had come from Moira to work for Lord Deramore. They lived just outside Newtownbreda in a wee cottage.

James McVeigh had a horse called Fanny and a cart which he used to take logs from the sawmill to Lord Deramore's land steward, Charlie Brown who was succeeded by David Ireland. The sawmill was down near the Lagan, water from which was used to drive the mill. The village forge belonged to a Mr Corry.

After they were married Miss Byers' father and mother lived in a very old house near Shaw's Bridge; it was mostly one storey with a loft and had a high wall around the garden; it was part of the estate and was said to have been at one time a house of the gentry. There were lots of outhouses. In the garden were gooseberry and blackcurrant bushes and vegetables. Her father reared ducks, turkeys and guinea hens for the "big house".

Estate workers, like her father, got free milk, coals, potatoes and as much as they could take from the orchards.

Miss Byers remember her father telling her about a very big "shoot" which was held at Belvoir the same year as the Lagan froze over and there was skating on the river. There was also a very big storm that year.

Her mother before her marriage worked for Mrs Cleland who taught at the school in the village and also ran the Post Office. She looked after Mrs Cleland's children, did the housework and helped in the Post Office as well. Miss Byers was taught by Mrs Cleland at the old school in School road. There were 2 classrooms with a gallery in front of the small classroom, a cloakroom through the front door and dry closets in the yard. Sunday School outings were to places like the Giant's Ring.

She remembers lighters (barges) and pleasure boats on the River Lagan and canal. People lived on the lighters – a man, his wife and family, - most of which carried coal. Horses were used to pull or tow (hence – towpath) the barges along the canal. One day a heavily laden

barge was rounding the curve at Lord Dungannon's Lock – just opposite Belvoir – when the pull became too great for the horse and it was pulled into the canal.

Her father and mother used to shop at Stranmillis and to get there they would cross the canal by the small wooden bridges at each lock. Miss Byers did not like this as she thought it was dangerous.

When the Wilsons went on holiday her father and mother acted as caretakers of the big house.

When Miss Byers' father retired the family moved to the house in the village where Miss Byers lives now. He received no retirement pension from his job and died aged 77 in March 1948.

## **THE HOUSE**

Work commenced on the building of the House during the 1740s on the instruction of Viscountess Midleton, who it is said, gave the estate the name Belvoir: as much for the beautiful view – belle voir – as for the fact that she had spent many happy childhood days at Belvoir Castle, near Grantham in Lincolnshire.

The Viscountess had two sons by her first husband, the Right Honourable Michael Hill MP for Hillsborough. The second son Arthur, was her favourite and it was for him that she created Belvoir. However she died in 1747 before the house was finished, indeed Mrs Delaney the 18<sup>th</sup> century diarist of Mount Panther, Dundrum wrote while staying at Belvoir in 1758 that “although a very good house it was not yet completed”!

The house may have been designed by Cassels, a German architect of the time, who had just previously designed Knockbreda Parish Church and a number of other large houses in Ireland including Leinster House in Dublin. The building had a shingled roof as a press report of 1760 stated that it had been blown off in a storm.

The Dungannon family sold the property at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in 1865 during the Bateson's time the architect W J Barre carried out extensive renovations. W J Barre is also known for designing the Albert Clock in High Street, Belfast.

The original house, according to one observer, was not impressive as it was “an old fashioned square building”. However the 19<sup>th</sup> century renovations seemed to have improved its appearance as it was later described as “the finest Georgian mansion around Belfast”.

## **THE 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 Dungannons 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 and during the 1850s a boy was bitten by a pine marten when he put his hand into a magpie’s nest.

## **THE ICE HOUSE**

In common with other large country houses of the period an ice house was built to store ice to keep provisions fresh. This building is situated on the slope of the motte next to the river. It is buried in the ground to take advantage of the lower and steadier temperatures that exist below ground level. The position is also essential to allow the melted water from the stored ice to drain away in this case into the River Lagan below. The entrance faces to the North keeping the sun from warming the interior.

Ice was packed into the interior during the winter when the rivers and ponds froze over. This task was probably done by the head gardener and his staff. Once the store was filled it was shut up and the entrance tunnel filled with straw for extra insulation.

## **THE RESIDENTS OF BELVOIR HOUSE**

The Dungannon family enclosed the estate and built the first house at Belvoir in the 1740s. They lived here until around 1804 after which time a Captain Cortland Skinner is known to have been in residence. A '98 Officer Captain Skinner is thought to have been the agent of Viscount Dungannon, as his father-in-law Edward Kingsmill of Ormeau House had held the post before him. Captain Skinner, it is worth noting commanded the Belvoir Infantry, a Corps of Yeomanry which was disbanded in 1814.

In 1808 an auction was held at Belvoir, prior to the sale of the estate, when 3,000 books were sold from the library. The following year the house and part of the estate was sold to 3 merchants, John Gillies, William Blacker and Robert Davis. However the bankruptcy of Gillies in 1811 led to Robert Bateson buying the house and land and also those parts belonging to Blacker and Davis. In 1818 the second Viscount Dungannon sold the remainder of the estate to Robert Bateson.

The Batesons or Deramores, as they become known after taking the title in 1885, lived at Belvoir until the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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, mostly torpedos 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.