

Lords and labourers

Major George Rawdon, (1604-1684) from West Yorkshire, came to the area in 1631 to manage the Estate of Viscount Conway at Killultagh. He built the Garrison at Aghalee, which we know as Soldierstown. It derives its name from a troop of horse and two companies of foot soldiers being stationed there during the rebellion. The garrison was close to the present site of Soldierstown church. Lord Conway built a church there in 1666.

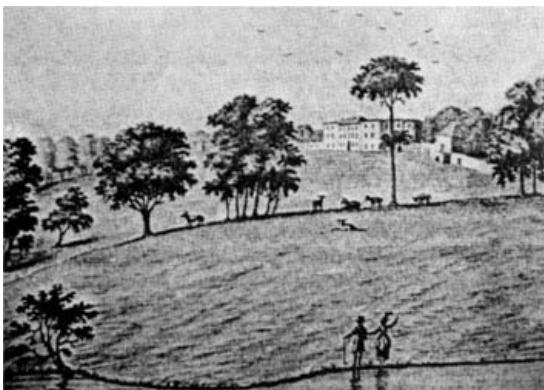
In the Rebellion of 1641-2, the armies of Sir Phelim O'Neill are said to have massacred thousands of Protestants. George Rawdon, with an army of 200 Englishmen completely repulsed O'Neill's army at the Battle of Lisburn. Twice he escaped death (in Lisburn 1641 and in Armagh 1642) when in each battle his horse was shot from under him. History records that he did all he could to maintain peace in Ireland and even had his men reap the Irish harvest in 1643.



In 1651, ten years after the Rebellion, Major de Burgh built a brick house at Moira. But soon after, Rawdon became the new owner of the house and estate. The Major received large grants of land, particularly O'Lavery's lands and property in Dublin, as a reward for services rendered to the Crown. The lands were confiscated, because of O'Lavery's involvement in the uprising. The name Lavery is still very prominent in the area and not just because the famous artist Sir John Lavery has associations with Moira. We will return to the O'Lavery name later in the story.

Rawdon was responsible for much of the early growth and development of Lisburn after the Rebellion. He bought the Ballynahinch estate around 1660. Over the next twenty years he rebuilt Ballynahinch from scratch, erected cornmills, and laid out the market square. Although the Rawdon family would eventually move their seat to Ballynahinch, they still had big plans for Moira and were largely responsible for the Moira we know today. George Rawdon was a Member of Parliament for Belfast and was made a Baron in 1665.

His son Arthur Rawdon (1662-1695) was born and grew up here. Like his father, he was a Member of Parliament and became a General in King William of Orange's Army. When King William landed in Ireland, Rawdon had raised troops and rallied to his side. His exploits are well documented. He was such an effective leader that he was given the nickname "Cock of the North." Rawdon was seriously wounded in the trenches in Portglenone, yet still led his men through tremendous battles and eventually was besieged in Derry. (1688-1689) There he became dangerously ill. He still played a very significant role in the events of that siege but illness eventually necessitated his escape and he returned to Moira. He ended his military service and set about developing the Moira estate. He too received a Knighthood.



Only known illustration of Moira Castle

When Sir Arthur inherited the lands at Moira he rebuilt the Mansion which became one of the most magnificent Castles in the country. We have very little idea of what it looked like except for one illustration.

Arthur was fascinated by stories of the exotic plants and seeds in Jamaica so he engaged a gardener called James Harlow to go to Madeira and Jamaica in 1692 to bring back plants for Moira. In his estate he built the first hot-house in Europe. According to Bassett's History of Co. Down, frogs were first discovered in Ireland at Moira, probably in the magnificent botanical gardens. Rawdon became known as the "Father of Irish gardening."

Sadly Sir Arthur lived only a short time to enjoy the garden he created and loved, for he died in 1695 on his birthday, at the early age of thirty-four, perhaps in part due to the injuries and illnesses he suffered in the war. But what a magnificent castle and demesne he built in less than 11 years!

Sir Arthur's successor was Sir John (1690-1723). Throughout his short life he had much ill health, owing to tuberculosis. He was buried in the family vault underneath the newly consecrated Parish Church - perhaps the first burial.

His son, also John, (1720-1793) was born in the castle and inherited the estates at the age of three. He is the one credited with the development of the village, though if dates are correct; it is more likely his father was the prime developer. It is generally accepted the village was completed in 1735 at which point young John was only 15 years old.

John was knighted and later elevated to the peerage. He became Earl of Moira in 1762. This first Earl was a well known figure in Irish Government circles. He built a magnificent House, known as Moira House, on the South Quays in Dublin in 1752. He decorated and furnished it in the most sumptuous style; the octagonal salon had large windows, the sides of which were inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Also in the 1760s he built Montalto House, Ballynahinch.

Politically he was in favour of the uniting of Ireland under its own rule. The Earls of Moira lived during the penal times of wretchedness and persecution for Catholics. It was an era when it was punishable by death for Catholics to practice their religion yet the Earls seem to have been a support to Catholics. In 1178 the Monastery in Maralin had been sacked by John de Courcey. Many relics were destroyed but Ronan's Bell, called the Clough Rua, was kept hidden in the community for centuries. Sir John gave it more secure keeping in Moira castle. It is now in The National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. (Parish of Magheralin by Kieran Clendinning)



Moira Park

But the Earl's attitude to the Penal laws was more publicly demonstrated. In the mid 1730's his hospitality was extended to Father Tighe of Magheralin parish. It was illegal at time, but the priest was a regular guest at Moira Castle. This hospitality was also extended to his successor, Father Lavery, who is described as an "intimate friend of Lord Moira." (Parish of Magheralin by Kieran Clendinning. If the dates given are correct, then hospitality was by Sir John's son John who was born in 1719 or 1720). These clergy were not the last "men of the cloth" to be welcomed to Moira Castle.

This first Earl was married three times. His first wife died five years after their marriage. He then married Anne Hill, sister of the Marquis of Downshire. She died without having a family, and was buried in the family vault and is said to be the Lady Moira who supposedly haunts Moira Demesne.

The third Lady Moira was Lady Elizabeth Hastings, daughter of the ninth Earl of Huntingdon. (married in 1752) Her mother was a famous follower of John Wesley, and was the founder of the Methodist group known as the Countess of Huntingdon's Connection. By all accounts Elizabeth was a remarkable lady with exquisite taste. She is credited with making Moira Castle a splendid place but that was eclipsed by the splendour of Moira House on the banks of the Liffey in Dublin. Just about anyone of importance in Irish history of that time dined there. Her obituary says her home was "the favourite seat of taste and splendour" and describes her as "a most liberal patroness... her great income was spent in acts of charity and unbounded liberality Her Ladyship's death is an irreparable loss to the poor of Dublin, as well as those who daily participated of her splendid board".

It appears Lady Moira may have spent most of her time in Dublin rather than in Moira and some historians suggest that depression or incompatibility with her husband meant them living apart. There are however indications of her in residence in Moira. An example is her actions during a particularly unsettled time in the 1770s in Ulster. There was an uprising under the name "Hearts of

Flint" (The movement used a variety of names) because of rent levels, evictions and local taxation. Frequently these turned violent and on one occasion the village of Moira was under threat. The warning, later believed by Lady Moira to be malicious, was that the Hearts of Flint had "vowed to hang every Moira person at their own door" unless they joined the protest. Lady Moira was in residence and she wrote in haste to ask for soldiers to come to their aid. Her concern was not that her village people might attack her for she said she was "perfectly persuaded the infatuated people who surround me are incapable of doing me an injury." She wanted military support to prevent intimidation of her villagers. (See *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* by Angela Bourke)

Eventually the Rawdon family's links with Moira were loosened. They moved their seat to Ballynahinch. This is said to have happened around 1770. (McGill Faculty of Education, Montreal <http://www.mcgill.ca/education>). When Sir John died in 1793, his funeral was said to have been the largest ever seen in Ireland and it took place in Moira. He was buried in the family vault in St. John's, Moira. The funeral was attended by upwards of 800 carriages of various kinds, with a train of 4000 people, among whom 2000 hatbands and scarves were distributed." (Samuel Lewis' *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* – published 1837–<http://www.lecalehistory.co.uk/>)

The new inhabitant of the castle was Colonel William Sharman, Irish M.P. for Lisburn. Sharman was very prominent in the history of the area. He commanded the Moira Volunteers, a contingent of the Irish Volunteers. The Volunteers had originally been formed as a defensive force against the threat of a French invasion, but they carried their militancy into politics and made it clear to the King's representatives in Dublin that they would welcome the abolition of the restrictions on religious worship, the holding of office, and freedom of trade. A son, William was born here in 1781 and became a very notable politician with the name William Sharman Crawford. (1781-1861)

Gabriel Beranger stayed in Moira Castle from 2nd to 12th July 1799 where he was "received with all the friendship and hospitality imaginable" by William Sharman and his wife. He gave a fascinating insight into 12th July celebrations in the village more than 200 years ago. "I spent (sic) time here in a most delightful manner until the 12th of July, anniversary of the Battle of Aughrim,(sic) when the various yeomanry of the country, divided in different bodies, each with their proper ensigns, males and females, adorned with orange lilies and ribbands, marched up the avenues. We went adorned in the same way upon the steps of the castle, to see them all pass before us; from whence they were to march to the various churches in the environs, to hear a sermon on the occasion, and then adjourn to the public houses, to spend the remainder of the day in merriment; and as all of them were strict Orangemen, and might, when in liquor, insult anyone not adorned like themselves, I was dressed out with orange lilies and ribbons, and having taken leave of this amiable family, entered in a post chaise at 12 o'clock, and set out on my return for Banbridge. (The Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland")

In 1800 the Demesne was purchased by the family of Sir Robert Bateson. (1782-1863) Bateson was MP for County Londonderry and also owned Belvoir Park in Belfast. He resided there and it is suggested he used the Castle as a second residence. His son Thomas (1819-1890) became Lord Deramore in 1885, and died in 1890.

Moira castle was allowed to fall into disrepair and was finally dismantled. The ballroom doors are today the inner porch doors in the Parish Church and the castle stairway banisters are now the Communion Rails. (Journal of the Craigavon Historical Society Vol. 2 No. 1)

Times were hard. The country was very unsettled politically and indeed very dangerous. The Earls and Lords and Knights could move to their other castles and demesnes but the commoner was left to make the most of his humble lot in Moira. And it was a struggle to exist but there was nowhere they could go. Here there was work, however hard and poorly paid, and at least some protection.

It is encouraging to discover that the Aristocracy here in Moira did care to a degree about the commoners in their village. Right from the earliest days, the people in the Castle considered the poor and helped provide employment and income for the villagers. The first Earl "erected and endowed an English Protestant school for 24 poor children and done (sic) many other acts of public munificence." (A general History of Ireland by John Angel Publ. 1781) Arthur Rawdon's wife, Lady Rawdon "was

endowed with extraordinary virtues ... and her charities were numberless to all in distress and will never be forgotten.” (The Rawdon Papers by Edward Berwick 1819)

The production of linen in Ulster was to transform the province from the poorest in Ireland into the richest and Moira's poorer residents reaped some benefit from that. The development of the linen industry in the village was due to the support of Sir John Rawdon, who gave premiums, and in other ways encouraged its manufacture. In 18th C. many people in Moira were involved in the linen trade. Most homes had a loom. Small farmers, labourers and cottiers supplemented their incomes by working looms from home. The raw material was supplied and weavers got paid for the finished product. In 1740 a monthly brown linen market had been established. Large quantities of linen were sold in the town and neighbourhood.



Linen industry in Moira

However mechanisation eventually put an end to this income. New factory looms were invented and each loom could do the work of 100 hand weavers. The result was that tens of thousands in rural Ulster lost a valuable source of income. Any weavers who lived on uneconomical farms of 12 acres, or less, suffered most. The linen industry declined even more rapidly due to population reduction following the Famine and just about survived into the 20th century. The last weaver in Moira was Mr. James McCoy whose "weaving shop was in a cottage about half a mile from the Lurgan end of the village".



Lime kilns

Although linen was the main industry, there was also a brewery and bottling business near "Palmer's Corner". Moira was also an important centre for limestone quarrying as evidenced by numerous abandoned quarries. There were many kilns always at work, and vast quantities of the stone in its natural state were annually sent away by the canal, and by land carriage, to distant parts. Lime kilns are still to be seen on the Clarehill Road. Another similar business existed on the Old Kilmore Road. There were also quarries of excellent basalt, in great demand for building.

Of course many tenant farmers worked the land in the area and one landowner, William Sharman Crawford MP, was very helpful. He "greatly increased the prosperity of the tenants on his large estates by extending and confirming the Ulster custom of tenant-right and the main object for which he strove during his long parliamentary career was to give legal effect to this right and to extend it to other parts of Ireland. The tenant farmers justly regarded him as their champion." (A Compendium of Irish Biography by Alfred Webb 1878) "There is (or was) an obelisk erected to his memory near Crossgar bearing the following inscription. "This monument has been erected by a grateful and attached tenantry, and other friends, in memory of one who, during a long life, was ever a most kind and considerate landlord, the friend of the poor, and the universal advocate of tenant right, and of every measure calculated to promote civil and religious liberty."

There is more evidence from the 18th and early 19th C. that some of the upper classes cared for the poor. A sum of £200, bequeathed by the Waring brothers of Waringfield House was distributed by the churchwardens to the poor housekeepers of this parish. The first Earl of Moira bequeathed a sum of money, which, with some other legacies, amounts to nearly £400, the interest of which is annually distributed among poor housekeepers.

(Samuel Lewis' Topographical Dictionary of Ireland – published 1837 ~ <http://www.lecalehistory.co.uk/>)

In 1837 there were parochial schools at Moira and Lurganville, supported by Sir Robert Bateson. Lady Bateson established a school for females in Moira. She built the school-house, a large and handsome edifice with a residence for the mistress attached, and by whom also the children are principally clothed; and at Battier is a national school. These schools afford instruction to about 200 children: in a private school there are about 80 children, and there is also a Sunday school. (Samuel Lewis' Topographical Dictionary of Ireland – published 1837~<http://www.lecalehistory.co.uk/>)

A memorial tablet to Sir Robert in St John's Church, Moira is an example of the flowery Victorian style of writing, but was apparently a sincere tribute: "His hand was open as his heart was tender and on his venerable head were showered the blessings of the poor. His home was hallowed by his spotless life and happy in the sunshine of his cheerfulness," etc, etc.

Just outside Moira was the Friends Agricultural School opened at Brookfield in 1836 though this does not appear to have had the support of the land owners. This may have been the private school mentioned above. The School was primarily a Quaker School for "disowned" children – for those not in membership of the Society. This was at a time when Quakers marrying non Quakers were automatically disowned. Later the terms of admission were widened to include children of parents in membership, who had limited means. Eventually, carefully selected pupils, not in any way connected with the Society of Friends, were accepted. Children were enrolled from all over Ireland.



Brookfield school

The boys were expected to work part-time on the farm (up to 22 hours per week at one point), helping with the crops, looking after the animals, providing vegetables for the school and for sale. The aim was to make the school almost self supporting in food and at the same time give the boys practical training in agriculture and farm management. Girls were not expected to work on the land but they did the milking, they helped in the kitchen, cleaned, churned butter and did dressmaking.

Elementary school subjects were taught part-time, but the main objective was "to train the children in a religious life and conversation consistent with our profession". I am not sure how one Master taught that. Legend says his punishments included compulsory cold baths in mid-winter and forcible lifting by the ears! About 1877 a separate day school was set up for "the surrounding poor" which is now Brookfield Primary school on Halfpenny Gate Road. Brookfield Agricultural School closed in 1921 but the final headmaster, Charles Benington continued a small private school there until 1930.

Around 1845-1850, the Great Famine and fever raged through the whole of Ireland. In 1851 more than 1 million people died. It is said that the population of Ireland will not return to pre-famine levels until the year 2024.



Balloonigan House

Ulster was stricken by cholera in the mid nineteenth century and Belfast was particularly affected. But it appears it even reached Moira. It appears Ballunigan House, a listed building close to where the M1 Motorway crosses the Lagan, was once a Cholera Hospital. The old ruined tomb in the graveyard at the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church records the death of a well loved local Doctor. The inscription reads. "Thomas Simpson of Moira, Surgeon, who fell victim to malignant cholera on 29th December 1832 aged 34 years."

At the same period the potato crop was failing, as it had done on and off since 1728 and then blight killed the crop almost overnight. Potatoes had been the staple diet of the paupers and were replaced by oatmeal, buttermilk, soup made from cows' and sheep's heads, and bread. The poorest had porridge for breakfast and supper. There was nothing else.

The famine had some impact on Moira. Correspondence of the period suggests that individual appeals for money from English friends were made by some residents. These were to aid efforts to provide meals for local children. There were reports of “the destitute condition of the labouring classes” in Moira and a committee funded by public subscription and Government in Dublin was able to provide some food aid to 300 people. (Craigavon Historical society)

In 1847 Lurgan Poorhouse was full and seventy people died there in one day. Yet it is surprising that, in Moira, parish records give no details of distress until the following year. In 1848 the Vestry "Resolved that each person applying for a coffin shall furnish a certificate of their incapacity to pay". That year the Vestry paid £11 10s.1p. for coffins. That would be enough for about twenty persons. The number of burials in the Registers for the years 1846 - 48 does not show a significant increase.



Famine scene (not Moira)

Drift to the towns and emigration reduced the population in the immediate post-Famine years. In 1834 the population of Moira parish was 3930. By 1911 that had dropped to 1662. (From Archdeacon Atkinson's Dromore: An Ulster Diocese) The National School in Moira records show that there were 108 children on the Roll in 1906.

Of course by the time of the famine, the aristocracy had long since vacated Moira, the castle was a ruin, the land-owners lived elsewhere. Yet I wonder if the apparent reduced impact of the famine here was perhaps due to Moira residents being better cared for by their land-owners.

But the future of Moira was to a large degree in the hands of those who lived and laboured here. That we have a village today is due in no small measure to those ordinary men and women who would not give up.