



St. John's Church, Moira

Lords and landlords

The foundations of present-day Moira were established in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. For one hundred and fifty years the vision, influence and wealth of those who lived in Moira Castle helped cement a community that still exists almost four centuries later. Those builders are the focus of this chapter.

Sir George Rawdon, 1stBaronet Rawdon of Moira (1604-1684)

The first man to put a significant mark on this area was George Rawdon. Rawdon came from West Yorkshire in 1631 as secretary or agent for Edward Conway, 2nd Viscount Conway who had an extensive estate with Lisburn Castle as his home. Conway was largely an absentee landlord and Rawdon had his own room in the castle. George Rawdon deserves enormous credit for the remarkable achievements attributed to Conway in the Lagan valley area in the mid-seventeenth century. He skilfully managed the estate and was a successful farmer, introducing up-to-date agricultural methods that greatly increased production. He began to establish industries such as iron works and the manufacturing of glass, soap, stockings and potash. He encouraged the local manufacture of linen, informing Conway in 1667, "I got four barrels of hemp seed and four of flax from Ostend."¹ A remarkable

¹ Quoted in "George Rawdon and Lisburn" by George McBratney.
http://lisburn.com/history/history_lisburn/george_radwon_and_lisburn.html

transformation of a difficult area was realised in the most demanding of times.

George Rawdon added military leadership to his achievements in Ireland. He built the garrison at Aghalee, commonly known today as Soldierstown, getting its name from a troop of horse and two companies of foot soldiers who were stationed there during the rebellion of 1641-2. One source says the garrison was close to the site of the present Holy Trinity Church of Ireland at Soldierstown but it is also possible that property on a farm nearer Moira was the actual site. That house has a date-stone marked 1688.

Rawdon's town of Lisnagarvey was of strategic importance, controlling access on the River Lagan and on the vital communication route between Carrickfergus and Dublin. Rawdon saw it as part of his calling in life to fight like a proud imperialist to retain military control of the town and district.

In the rebellion, Lisnagarvey remained loyal to Charles I. Sir Phelim O'Neill sought to occupy it but George Rawdon, with an army of two hundred Englishmen completely repulsed the rebels. Rawdon escaped death when he was shot in the hand and when his horse was shot from under him. But when the rebels failed to capture Lisnagarvey they burned it to the ground.

By then Rawdon lived in a great house belonging to Conway at Moynargedell (Magheragall) "with a stone bawne about it buylded fifteen foote high."² The defences did not stop it being overrun and

² An Historical Account of the Diocese of Down and Connor, Ancient and Modern by Right Rev. Monsignor James O'Laverty M.R.I.A.

burned as the rebels retreated, destroying a valuable library of almost ten thousand books and manuscripts belonging to Conway.

With the rebellion quelled, Rawdon did much to promote the early growth and development of Lisnagarvey or Lisburn, as it became known after the rebellion. He became “mayor” of the town with tremendous powers over all aspects of life. He was not afraid to exercise his power to dispense justice; even to sentence horse thieves to death by hanging.

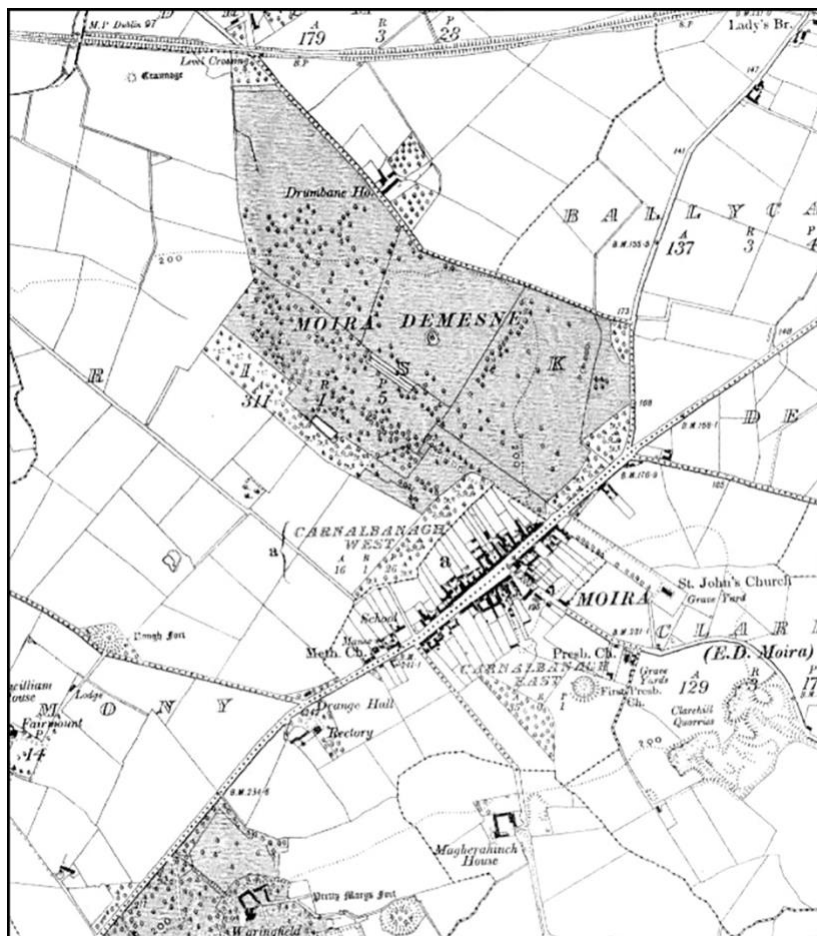
And it was not just within the town that his influence was felt. He was responsible for the beginnings of the road system we have over much of the area today. One traveller, Richard Dobbs, wrote in 1683,

All the highways within eight or ten miles of Lisburn are very good - not only for the nature of the soil, which generally affords gravel and sand, but from Sir George Rawdon’s care, who is, I believe, the best High Way Man in the kingdom.³

George Rawdon was truly a remarkable man. Within fifty years of his arrival in Lisburn, the small vulnerable settlement that had been surrounded by wood and bog, had become a centre of civilisation and economic activity, largely due to his untiring efforts. All of these activities made Rawdon so busy, that his wife complained in a letter to her brother (Rawdon had married the Viscount Conway’s only sibling, Dorothy), that she seldom saw him except noon and night. However because Conway was largely absent from his estate, the Rawdons enjoyed a rather high social standing and

³ Quoted in An Historical Account of the Macdonnells of Antrim by Rev. George Hill.

entertained lavishly.



Ordnance Survey map © Crown Copyright 1900

Although Rawdon had such a part in establishing Lisburn, the Rawdon name is now more associated with Moira and

Ballynahinch. This is surely due to the influence of the later generations of Rawdons as we shall see, but it was George who first began the development of Moira.

For services to the Crown, Rawdon received property in Dublin and also large grants of land in County Down. Because of the Magennis family's involvement in the uprising, their land was confiscated and since Rawdon was a member of the commission of revenue, he appears to have received a generous part of it. Another to benefit from alienations of land in the area was Edward Burgh who got O'Lawry's land.⁴ It is quite probable that this man was Captain Burgh, a military officer serving with George Rawdon.

In the early 1650s, Rawdon became the new owner of a large brick house and estate in Moira. The house had been built by a Major de Burgh who had not occupied it for very long. He is likely to have been the landowner just mentioned for he had bought land encompassing much of Moira in 1639.⁵

⁴ The Plantation of Ulster: War and Conflict in Ireland by Jonathan Bardon

⁵ Edward Burgh obtained from Hugh O'Loury of Reske, County of Downe, the towns, lands, sessiaghs, and parcels called Reske, containing 120 acres; Carneallbanagh, 60 acres, Drombane, 60 acres; Gortemoney, 60 acres; League, 60 acres; Kilmonyoge, 60 acres; and Taghloomny, 20 acres. These lands, known generally as Meyrah (Moira) Burgh purchased from O'Laury in 1639 for the sum of £300 – Thorpes' Catalogue of Southwell MSS p.209 as displayed in a footnote in The Montgomery Manuscripts (1603-1706) by William Montgomery. (Note that the name is spelt differently within this short footnote and is used interchangeably in other references.)

Sir George Rawdon was a privy councillor and Irish Member of Parliament for Belfast in 1639. In later years he was Member of Parliament for Carlingford and was appointed the Governor of Carrickfergus Castle. He was made a Baron in 1665.

Among all his other activities, Rawdon had a great interest in horticulture. He successfully imported and grafted apple cultivars from England, raising a substantial orchard at Moira. Something of that interest would be passed on to his descendants. When George Rawdon died, he was buried in the chancel of Lisburn Cathedral.

Rawdon had made a fortune through serving the Conways and through his marriage. By the time of his death he had become an extensive landowner with estates in Antrim, Down and Wicklow as well as the family seat in Yorkshire. But the appearance of wealth can be deceptive and soon after his death the whole future of the Rawdons in Moira was in doubt because of serious financial difficulties.

Although the Rawdon family would eventually settle in Ballynahinch, George's family home remained in Moira for several generations where they not only established a community but developed it, leaving a legacy that has lasted to this day.

Sir Arthur Rawdon, 2nd Baronet of Moira (1662-1695)

George's son Arthur was born and raised in Moira. He was the youngest of three boys and suffered from very poor health. As an

attempt to improve his physical condition, Arthur was sent to France in 1671, when he was just nine years old. His two older brothers were already there but both were tragically killed in separate incidents in 1676. It was a heart-breaking year for the family, for Arthur's mother also died in that year.

When his father Sir George died in 1684, Arthur inherited the Baronetcy and the estate. He was just twenty-two years old but was immediately faced with a major predicament. It was said that there was not one sixpence of ready money left to pay legacies and funeral costs. To provide for Arthur's unmarried sisters, family properties in Yorkshire were disposed of and the sale of farm stock and other valuables raised less than £100.⁶

Arthur had expected to inherit not only his father's property but Conway's also. He was the "darling" of Lord Conway, his uncle on his mother's side, and since Conway had no children and treated Arthur as his heir apparent, it seemed certain that he would still be a wealthy man. However in 1683, when Conway lay dying, he was prevailed upon to change his will to benefit distant relatives called Seymour. Only Arthur's sisters were mentioned in the will. Arthur was convinced that Conway was not *compos mentis* at the time and went to law against Popham Seymour who had been a witness to the will. However Arthur had lost two previous expensive court cases through what he believed to be judicial corruption and the influence of Seymour in Irish Government circles. He abandoned the suit as long as his sisters received their inheritance. In the event they received only half of what they were due.

⁶ Information gleaned from *The Anglo-Irish Experience, 1680-1730: Religion, Identity and Patriotism* by David Hayton. page 179. Publ. 2012. The Boydell Press.

This financial struggle might easily have altered the history of this island. A supporter of James II wrote to Rawdon's wife in an attempt to get Arthur to dissociate himself from northern Protestants. He mentioned the loss of the Lisburn estate;

If your husband was advised by me, he would do as he did in Monmouth's rebellion - offer to raise men to serve the King, and by that means entitle himself to Mulgrave⁷ and Seymour's estate in Ireland, out of which he was so notoriously wronged. I pray God direct him for the best.⁸

To Lady Rawdon, it was certainly a very tempting offer and correspondence between the two indicates that she was prepared to offer support and certainly appears to "have supplied him with important information respecting the movements of northern Protestants."⁹ But Arthur did not abandon his allegiances for financial gain and that decision would have far-reaching consequences for this land.

To add to Rawdon's woes, it was nearly impossible at the time to get rents from Irish tenants because the country was so poor. Arthur wrote to his friend Hans Sloane in 1688 saying, "I believe no country was ever so poor, nor is there any prospect of amendment."¹⁰ Yet somehow through all of these financial

⁷ Mulgrave was the old Lady Conway. She had been previously married to Earl Mulgrave and had been bequeathed the Irish property during her life.

⁸ The Rawdon Papers. Letters to and from Dr John Bramhall edited by Rev. Edward Berwick. Publ. 1819. Quote from a letter by Sir Thomas Newcomen to Lady Rawdon, wife of Sir Arthur Rawdon. Dublin January 17, 1688-9.

⁹ The Montgomery Manuscripts: (1603-1706) by William Montgomery p. 277

¹⁰ Rawdon to Hans Sloane 10th May 1688. Sloane MS 4036, p. 34-5.

challenges, Arthur was to throw what energies his health permitted into three major challenges. He had a passion for horse-racing and tried to establish a racecourse on land at Ballynahinch. It seems to have been a financial disaster. He was more successful in his other challenges. He was greatly interested in horticulture but before he could fully indulge that passion, another issue demanded his attention.

Charles II had encouraged James' Protestant daughter Mary to marry William of Orange, to ensure a Protestant heir to the throne. James had converted to Catholicism and married a Catholic. On Charles' death, he was succeeded by James II. Then James had a son who would replace Mary as heir.

In response, William invaded England and ousted his father-in-law who was allowed to exile in France. In 1689 William and Mary became joint monarchs. Arthur Rawdon was a fervent supporter of William.

When James II arrived in Ireland, with help from by Louis XIV, Rawdon determined to stop his attempts to use Ireland as a base to invade England and take back his crown. Arthur had been Captain of a troop of horse while his father was alive and was now appointed Commander of a regiment of dragoons. Despite his health problems, he was a fiercely committed to the Protestant cause and his regiment was often in the thick of military enterprises, though not always successfully. Early in January 1689 he led five hundred men from Moira to Lisburn in an attempt to disarm James' forces and so free Belfast to bring in supplies from England. The attack was aborted and as a result, he had to abandon

further plans to attack Newry and Carrickfergus.

The Protestant aristocracy formed defence associations and central leadership was in the hands of a Council of Five or “Junto.” One of those five was Arthur Rawdon and their headquarters initially were in his home in Moira, though future meetings seem to have been held in Hillsborough.¹¹ There is no doubt Rawdon was an inspirational and effective leader; he was given the nickname “Cock of the North.” One historian has described him as “aggressive, impetuous, hot-headed, and messianically anti-Catholic.”¹² He became so obnoxious to King James’ government that the Lord Deputy Tyrconnel identified him as a threat and made a proclamation against him and a few others on 7th March 1688/9. It stated that he was exempted from Royal mercy because,

... in regard he has been one of the principal actors in the rebellion and one of those who advised and fermented the same and inveigled others to be involved therein.¹³

A poem of the time describes “Brave Rawdon.”

Sir Arthur Rawdon’s horse rode to the plain
In warlike order, ‘bove a thousand men.
Some of his men strong polish’d armour bore
But he himself a silken armour wore.
Above a thousand men he thither brought
Who at Dromore against the Irish fought.¹⁴

¹¹ The Williamite Wars in Ireland 1688-1691 by John Childs. Publ. 2008 by Bloomsbury 3PL. page 35.

¹² Ibid. page 34.

¹³ The Rawdon Papers page 297.

¹⁴ Recounted in A History of the siege of Londonderry and defence of Enniskillen by Rev. John Graham. Publ. 1873 page 282.

Some of this may be fanciful, some perhaps factual, but there is no doubt that the encounter at Dromore was a disaster. James' soldiers took the Williamite army by surprise in South Down and rather than fight, a great number of Rawdon's men fled. It has been known ever since as the Break of Dromore. The Protestant armies were driven north towards Coleraine. It appears Moira Castle and land may have been ransacked as the attackers pillaged the properties of Protestants from Down.¹⁵ It would be strange if Rawdon's home escaped since he had such a high profile role in the war and yet, by 1690, the home and grounds were open to entertain troops assembling for the Battle of the Boyne.

Some of William's supporters took the opportunity to flee Ireland from Donaghadee; some surrendered or changed allegiances. Actually it was rumoured that Rawdon had changed sides - but Arthur was made of sterner stuff.

He and what was left of his men reached Coleraine. To try to protect the town from the enemy approaching from Armagh, Rawdon and others were ordered to Moneymore and Portglenone but even that failed to stop the enemy advance.

Despite sheer exhaustion and suffering serious wounds, Arthur survived and eventually retreated to Londonderry. Although illness and injury forced him to end his army role after the battle at Portglenone, he played a very significant role in the events leading

¹⁵ Capt. O'Lawry's Letter to Sir Arthur Rawdon, Bart., relative to the ruined condition of the House and Lands at Moy-rah; see *The O'Lavery's* by The Right Rev. Monsignor O'Lavery P.P. M.R.I.A. (1904)

up to the siege in that city. This included being one of the signatories of Declaration of Union on 21st March 1688/9, one month before the siege began.

However, all the exertions and injuries had a devastating effect upon him. Some senior officers were abandoning the city and heading to England. Rawdon's friends and physicians persuaded him to leave also and even the troops who felt abandoned by their leaders recognised that Rawdon was different. He left Ireland by ship from Lough Foyle just before the siege began. He spent months recovering.

Sir Arthur returned to Ireland just days before the arrival of King William's army at Carrickfergus in 1690.¹⁶ Already stationed in the Maralin and Moira area was a certain Captain Thomas Bellingham, an officer of the King, who was recording preparations for the battle with King James. Throughout June 1690, Captain Bellingham visited Moira and the surrounding towns and villages reporting the arrival of troops preparing for battle. He describes in his diary how on 2nd June he "walk'd in ye afternoon to Moyragh, saw Sir Arthur Rawden's house, and walk'd with Captain Ross to ye conservatory."¹⁷ On 12th he describes being in Moira again and seeing "Jewell's regiment of horse wch is a very good one: but ye Danish regiment of guards is ye best I ever saw. They are an orange colour'd livery fac'd with crimson velvet."¹⁸ He dined in Moira that day and appears to have spent the next couple of days in the

¹⁶ The Rawdon letters reveal that correspondence addressed to him show that on May 31st Rawdon was still residing at "Congertom, neere Manchester."

¹⁷ Thomas Bellingham: Diary of Thomas Bellingham, an officer under William III.

¹⁸ *ibid.* (The spelling of words and grammar in these quotes are as Bellingham wrote them.)

village. After dinner on 14th he says, “We fancyd we heard some great guns off, from Bellfast, which we hope are for ye King landing.”¹⁹ It was indeed the day of King William’s arrival in Ulster.

These visits give us a tantalising glimpse into Arthur’s life committed to military affairs and yet at the same time committed to his garden. For several years, despite his heavy military responsibilities and despite the lawlessness in the community, Arthur had been enthusiastically involved in horticulture and botany. He and Sir Hans Sloane²⁰ were close friends. Sloane had written to Rawdon in May 1687: “Sir, I hope by this you are very much advanced in your garden.” Sloane had sailed to the West Indies later that year and in May the following year Rawdon wrote asking him to send seeds from plants growing in the Jamaican mountains, believing they might survive in the colder climate of Ireland.

While still recuperating in 1689, Arthur had commissioned James Harlow to go to Jamaica to bring back living plants. For some time Rawdon wondered if he had been cheated, for he wrote to Sloane in March 1692, “I much wonder what is become of James. I fear he has a designe²¹ to cheat me for I cannot hear the least thing from him.” But a month later Harlow arrived in Carrickfergus with around one thousand living plants. Many survived, probably under the protection of the hothouse which Rawdon built in the Moira

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Sir Hans Sloane was born in Killyleagh and became a physician. But he also was a noted collector of objects from around the world. By his death in 1753 he had collected over 71,000 objects. Sloane bequeathed his collection to the nation in his will and it became the founding collection of the British Museum.

²¹ Spelling as in the original letter.

demesne. It is claimed that this hothouse was the first in Ireland.²² He generously shared duplicate plants with other gardens. In 1690 he employed William Sherard, considered to be the outstanding botanist of his day, as tutor to his family.

Records describe the demesne with its mansion and estate as a commodious habitation, surrounded by a wood, which affords beautiful walks, a large lawn extends in front, where sheep feed, and is terminated by trees, and a small lough eastwards; the rear of the Castle grounds contains a wood, with large opening fronting the Castle, which forms a fine perspective.²³

A rather strange entry is made in Bassett's History of Co. Down indicating that frogs were first discovered in Ireland at Moira, probably in those magnificent botanical gardens.

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. He bequeathed his curiosities and specimens to Hans Sloane. But what a magnificent Castle and demesne he built in such a short time and apparently with such meagre funds! Even in the year of his death he was seeking to put in place measures that would solve financial debts relating to the Rawdon estate.

Arthur Rawdon became known as the "Father of Irish gardening"

²² Some claim it was the first hothouse in Europe.

²³ *Memoir of Gabriel Beranger, and his labours in the cause of Irish art and antiquities, from 1760.*

but after his death the garden deteriorated.

Sir John Rawdon, 3rd Baronet of Moira (1690-1723)

Sir Arthur was succeeded by his son John. He had been born just months before the decisive Battle of the Boyne and suffered from tuberculosis all his life. John barely remembered his father who had spent every moment either obsessed with military affairs or gardening, and died when John was just five years old.

It seems John's mother moved from Moira after Arthur's death and the residence suffered. Helen had a very difficult time managing family debts, in the end using her own inheritance. Somehow the financial situation of the family improved before John attained the age of majority, but by then his mother had also died. He certainly behaved as though he were well off, purchasing many luxury items, refurbishing the house and replanting the garden. The gardens his father had created once again adorned the Castle, though many of the exotic plants had withered and died. John blamed their loss on the carelessness of the servants and the death of Mr Harlow, the gardener.

Sir John followed his grandfather and father into politics and became an Irish Member of Parliament for County Down but he always lived in the shadow of his forbearers' achievements.

However he seemed focused on improving his own community and this required improved properties. He began rebuilding the village with houses and businesses. Nearly three hundred years later,

many of those black-stone buildings are still standing with their narrow carriage archways leading to quiet courtyards or modern housing.

Sir John was a much-loved landlord in the village but died at thirty-three years of age. He was recognized as a person of great integrity, piety and charity. In the eulogy at his funeral he was described as always ready to do good, employing the poor in works of improvement but did not care to encourage strolling beggars who made a trade by begging.

The clergyman went on to say

The honour of God was the chief leading principle in Sir John's character. He was first and foremost a person of true seriousness and earnest devotion in public worship.²⁴

The Parish Church in Moira was built by Sir John, though tragically he did not live to see its completion let alone worship in it. He was buried in the vault before its consecration but the funeral service was in the Magheralin Church that he had attended all his life. That church is now an appealing ruin in Magheralin village.

John Rawdon, 1st Earl of Moira (1720-1793)

Sir John's son, also named John, was born in the Castle and inherited the estates at the age of three. He also seems to have inherited his father's character and interests. He is the one

²⁴ from A sermon preach'd at Magheralin on the occasion of the death of Sir John Rawdon, Bart. ... who died, Feb. 1. 1723. By George Wilkins, ... printed by J. Hyde and E. Dobson, for R. Gunne, 1725.

normally 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 1735²⁵ at which point young John was only fifteen years old.

Even as a teenager John took an avid interest in botanical specimens and horticulture. Sir Hans Sloane, who had been such an inspiration and friend to John's grandfather Arthur, wanted to trace specimens of particular plants he knew were in the possession of the Rawdon family. The specimens were from the Moira locality and from Jamaica. Through a mutual friend he contacted John Rawdon. The friend wrote back:

I have accordingly applied to Sir John Rawdon who is a youth between fifteen and sixteen years old and of great hopes - and though he has a great taste himself for gardening and knows most of our plants, yet out of regard to the friendship which has subsisted between your and his family, he is very willing to oblige you with all the plants he has of that kind to enrich your collection.²⁶

The same correspondence seems to indicate that John may have been reared by his aunt. The letter concludes with a PS: "Sir John and his aunt present you their respects." John's widowed mother had married Rev. Charles Cobb, later to become Archbishop of Dublin.

This second Sir John was later elevated to the peerage of Ireland as

²⁵ The date stone 1735 on the wall of the Midnight Haunt restaurant is generally regarded as a mark of the completion of the village.

²⁶ Sloane ms. 4054, f. 107. British Library, London, Quoted in E Charles Nelson.

the Lord Rawdon in 1750 and became Earl of Moira in 1762. A letter recommending his elevation says, "I cannot think our House of Lords would be dishonoured by (him). A man with a great estate who pays his debts and commits no act of violence and is well affected to the government."²⁷ The title had to be changed because of an error in spelling; he was initially called the Earl of Moyra²⁸ but by then, either the name of the village had changed or he was instigating the change.

The Rawdons lived during the penal times of wretchedness and persecution for Catholics. It was an era when it was punishable by death for Catholics to practise their religion, yet the Earl seems to have been a support to Catholics. One instance concerns a bell. In 1178 John de Courcey had sacked the Monastery in Maralin. Many relics were destroyed but St. Ronan Finn's Bell, the Clough Rua,²⁹ dating from the Battle of Moira, was found on the lands of Magherahinch.³⁰ It was kept hidden in the community for centuries. Two O'Lavery brothers had possession of it but after a disagreement, the family requested Sir John to give it secure keeping in Moira Castle from where it was later taken to Ballynahinch. After about sixty years, different branches of the family requested that it be returned and placed in the new chapel

²⁷ Stone, Dublin, to Weston. Public Record Office for Northern Ireland. PRONI Reference: T3019/1012.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Also called the Clog-Ruagh or Clog Ruadh.

³⁰ Quoted in Antiquarian Jottings. Ulster Journal of Archaeology Volume XI Publ. 1905.

at Moira.³¹ On 20th February 1815, Lord Moira's³² agent Mr William Hamilton handed it over to Rev. Fr Jennings for the new chapel but according to local tradition that clergyman never received it.³³ It is now said to be in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland³⁴ but others say it is lost again.

But Sir John's attitude to the Penal laws was even more publicly demonstrated in the mid 1730s. His hospitality was extended to Father Tighe of Magheralin parish. It was illegal at the time, but the priest was a regular guest at Moira Castle.³⁵ This hospitality was also extended to his successor, Father Lavery, who is described as an "intimate friend of Lord Moira."³⁶ As we shall discover, these clergy were not the last "men of the cloth" to be welcomed to Moira Castle.

John Rawdon married three times. His first wife died five years after their marriage. He then married Anne Hill, sister of the Marquess of Downshire – a strange union because he and the Downshires were politically at odds. The Earl was a Whig who supported the Volunteers' agenda of freeing the Irish Parliament

³¹ Newsletter March 14th, 1815. Although it reports that the bell was restored to the priest of Moira, it is doubtful if there was a Catholic church in Moira village at that time. Possibly it refers to the new church at Kilwarlin known as St Colman's, first built 1812. See later in this book - chapter Saints and sinners.

³² This Lord Moira was John's son who was the second Earl, Francis Rawdon-Hastings and at this time was Governor General of India.

³³ Quoted in Antiquarian Jottings. Ulster Journal of Archaeology Volume XI Publ. 1905. These details also published in the Belfast Newsletter.

³⁴ Stated in the parish of Magheralin by Kieran Clendinning.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid* (If the dates given are correct, then hospitality was by Sir John while he was still a teenager and not yet known as Lord Moira).

from subordination to Westminster. The Marquess of Downshire was a Tory.

But Rawdon's second wife also died without having a family, and was buried in the family vault in Moira. The ghost of this Lady Moira supposedly haunts Moira demesne or some think Lady's Bridge.³⁷

The third Lady Moira was Lady Elizabeth Hastings, daughter of the ninth Earl of Huntingdon. They 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 even that was outshone by the splendour of Moira House, Dublin built by the Earl on the banks of the Liffey in 1752. He decorated and furnished it in the grandest style; the octagonal salon had large windows, the sides of which were inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The Earl's wife was Ireland's leading Whig hostess and just about anyone of importance in Irish history of that time dined there in what was described as a place of constant and magnificent entertainments. On her death in the early nineteenth century her obituary said her home was "the favourite seat of taste and splendour" and describes her as

³⁷ Lady's Bridge gets its name, not from a ghost of Lady Moira, but from an old lady who lived nearby in the seventeenth century and who was the owner of a lot of land in that area. Source: *An Historical Account of the Diocese of Down and Connor, Ancient and Modern* by Right Rev. Monsignor James O'Laverty M.R.I.A. Publ. 1895.

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.³⁸

It appears Lady Moira may have spent much 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 reported 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 from Lurgan 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.³⁹ Eventually the Rawdon family's links with Moira were loosened. They moved their seat to Ballynahinch, where in the 1760s Sir John had built Montalto House.

When the Earl of Moira died in 1793, his funeral was said to have

³⁸ The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle for the year 1808 page 463.

³⁹ The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vol. V. Publ. 2002 by Cork University Press, Ireland.

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 eight hundred carriages of various kinds, with a train of four thousand people, among whom three thousand hatbands and scarves were distributed.⁴⁰

A sobering and soul-searching obituary marking Lord Moira's death appeared in *Heterogenea*, quoting words often used on headstones at the time:

*How lov'd, how valu'd once avail thee not;
To whom related, or by whom begot.
A heap of dust alone remains of thee:
'Tis all thou art! - and all the proud shall be.*⁴¹

Colonel William Sharman (1731-1803)

The Castle was leased to Colonel William Sharman, who was to become a Member of Parliament in Grattan's Parliament. This was the era when the Volunteer movement was growing in Ireland. The Earl of Moira and Colonel Sharman were both original members of the Whig Club. On 8th March 17__⁴² a company was formed in Moira.

The Minister of the Presbyterian Church in Moira at that time was a Volunteer enthusiast. Actually he is said to have sometimes

⁴⁰ Samuel Lewis' *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*. Publ. 1837.

⁴¹ This verse is a miss-quotation of some lines by Alexander Pope – *Elegy to the memory of an unfortunate lady*.

⁴² the year is missing – probably 1781. He was a minister in Moira from 1778-1784

preached in his uniform. Rev. Andrew Craig told how the Moira Volunteers began:

..... chiefly by my exertions and advice, and in consequence of an address to William Sharman, which I drew up, he accepted of the command of the company, contrary to the expectations, and perhaps wishes, of some of the neighbouring gentlemen, who took no part in the movement. My situation as chaplain induced me to take an active part in all the concerns of the company, which were a source of activity and pleasure.⁴³

Sharman not only was the local Volunteer Captain; he was elected Lt. Colonel of the Union Regiment of Volunteers.⁴⁴ By then the Volunteers had begun to pursue Catholic Emancipation. Because of that, Lord Moira (Son of the first Earl) stepped down as Colonel of the Union Regiment, and Sharman took his place. 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.

Sharman continued to have a very high profile in the Volunteer movement and was a member of the Volunteer Committee set up to investigate methods of bringing about a radical reform of the electoral system. He was Chairman of one of the famous Dungannon Conventions, a representative at the Volunteer

⁴³ An Autobiographical Sketch of Andrew Craig, 1754-1833. Presbyterian Minister of Lisburn, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*.

⁴⁴ Belfast Newsletter. 24th January 1834. obituary.

National Convention in Dublin in 1783 and in fact served as President at the Volunteer convention held in the city in October the following year.⁴⁵ That year he was also elected as an Member of Parliament for Lisburn. In July 1791 he was president of the Belfast celebrations by the Volunteers and others to commemorate the fall of the Bastille. In 1792 he was reviewing general for the last Volunteer review to be held in the north of Ireland at Dromore.

The Ulster Museum has a portrait showing Colonel William Sharman in full Volunteer Uniform with Moira Castle behind him.⁴⁶ A Volunteer Review is taking place. It is possible the portrait depicts the Volunteer review hosted by Sharman in Moira demesne on 16th October 1784. What is astonishing is that the portrait was commissioned by Sharman and painted by Thomas Robinson in 1798. By then Sharman had changed allegiances and had formed the Moyrah Yeomen. This placed him against former Volunteer colleagues who had now become United Irishmen, yet he was reminiscing about his glory days with the Union Regiment!

On 12th July 1799 Sharman hosted an Orange Order parade in Moira demesne and took the salute on the steps of his Castle. It was one of the very first “Twelfth” celebrations and is recorded by a visitor from Dublin who was Sharman’s guest.

I spended time here in a most delightful manner until the 12th July, anniversary of the Battle of Aughrim, when the various yeomanry of the country, divided in different

⁴⁵ Notes on Sharman from the Ulster Museum.

⁴⁶ National Museums NI catalogue number BTLUM U141
link<https://www.nmni.com/collections/art/paintings/belumu141>

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.⁴⁷

In the next generation, Sharman's son, William Sharman-Crawford, Member of Parliament for Dundalk, would support Catholic Emancipation. But in 1799 the family was shrewd enough not to antagonize its guests from the Loyal Orders.

William Sharman died in Moira Castle on 21st January 1803 and was buried at Drumbeg.

Sir Robert Bateson (1782-1863)

In 1805 the demesne was purchased by the family of Sir Robert Bateson. They were Lancashire people who had settled in Down in the mid-eighteenth century and owned Belvoir Park. The Sharman family still lived in Moira Castle for a few more years, continuing to rent the property from the Batesons.⁴⁸ It is suggested that Bateson then used the Castle as a second residence, though it is more likely

⁴⁷ Memoir of Gabriel Beranger, and his labours in the cause of Irish art and antiquities, from 1760 -1780 by Sir William Wylde.

⁴⁸ If this statement is correct, it would seem William Sharman-Crawford and his new wife lived for a short time in Moira Castle after their marriage.

that it was becoming a ruin by this time. It was the Bateson family which, around 1810, built the Market House we know today in Moira. The facades of the building are adorned by the Bateson crest.

At a dinner given in his honour in April 1825 Bateson congratulated his Moira tenants on the religious harmony and improved conditions on his estates and insisted that he wished to be considered only as “an honest independent country gentleman.”⁴⁹ He was highly respected for his involvement with various charitable and religious societies.

The Bateson family continued as landlords of the village for many years, though really as absentee landlords. There are no records of them ever visiting Moira let alone residing here.

⁴⁹ The History of Parliament Ref. Volumes: 1820-1832. Author: Stephen Farrell.

