



Rathmoyle
&

THE HISTORY OF THE LOCAL AREA

by Jane E. M. Crosbie

The Edwardian mansion of Rathmoyle is set in a 120 acre estate on the County Down coast of Northern Ireland. Since the late 1940's it has been owned by Short Brothers, who have preserved it as VIP guest accommodation, mainly for their overseas visitors. Since the privatisation of the Company – in October 1989, when Shorts became a Group of Bombardier Inc. of Canada – Rathmoyle has been extensively renovated and refurnished, under the direction of internationally recognised designer Michael Priest, and is today one of the finest examples of the Edwardian country house to be found in the British Isles.



Rathmoyle

Rathmoyle is a beautiful Edwardian house, set in attractive grounds on the coastal strip of North Down near the village of Helen's Bay. Helen's Bay was very much the brainchild of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava. Frederick Temple Blackwood had succeeded his father as the fifth Baron Dufferin and Claneboye in 1841 while still at Eton. He entered public service and in 1872 he was made Governor General of Canada and in 1884 Viceroy of India, after which he was elevated to the rank of Marquis, taking the title of Dufferin and Ava. In his private life he was what is known as an improving landlord and was so distressed by the conditions in Ireland during and after the famine, which was exacerbated if not caused by the neglect of their estates by absentee landlords, that he sold most of his Irish estates, only retaining his beloved Claneboye, which included the small bay beside Grey Point, around which Helen's Bay developed.

The village gained its name from Helen Selina Sheridan, Lady Dufferin, who was the mother of the Marquis. The Marquis

was devoted to his mother and had Helen's Tower erected on his estate between 1848-20 November 1862 when it was finally completed. The estate was used as a training ground during the first world war and a replica of this tower has been built in Northern France, dedicated to the memory of all those men and women from Ulster who served in the war.



Helen's Tower has the following lines, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, inscribed round the main chamber:

**Helen's Tower here I stand
Dominant over sea and land.
Son's love built me, and I hold
Mothers's love in lettered gold.**

The replica tower has the same verse only altered to read:

**Ulster's love built me, and I hold,
A Nation's love in lettered gold.**

The Marquis wanted to develop the coastal area around Grey Point as a ready-made luxury holiday resort with 'superior villas diversifying the landscape' (Belfast Newsletter, 1896) and the first six houses were erected on Church Road by a Mr Kerr in 1898. The Belfast and Co Down Railway Company, who had already co-operated with the Marquis





when he built his own ornate Railway Station at what became Helen's Bay (which is connected by a two-and-a-half mile long private avenue to Clandeboyne House), offered free rail travel for one year from Belfast to Helen's Bay to encourage new residents. It was from the railway station that the materials were transported by horse and cart to what became Rathmoyle House.



Originally called Eldon Green, the house was designed and built c. 1901 by Vincent Craig (1865-1925) for his own use. Vincent Craig was an older brother of James, Lord Craigavon (the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland) and the fourth of eight sons of James Craig Snr, a millionaire and partner in Dunville Distillery, Belfast. Craig grew up at Craigavon, the family home which is now a hospital on the outskirts of Belfast, and he was educated at Bath College. In the mid 1880's he joined the offices of William Henry Lynn, an architect of some renown who had himself been Sir Charles Lanyon's chief assistant. In 1889 Vincent Craig set up his own offices and one

The house, designed by Vincent Craig, brother of Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister, contains many interesting architectural features.

of his first commissions was St John's Presbyterian Church on the Ormeau Road Belfast. A Fellow of the Institute of British Architects and the Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland, Craig was considered to be somewhat avant-garde in his style, as may be seen, not only in the design of Rathmoyle itself, but also in the design of the clubhouse for the Royal Yacht Club, Bangor (1897-8) both of which employed an imaginative use of stained glass more in keeping with the developing trends in London than with the more severe and staid 'Victorian' architecture still very popular in the North of Ireland. Towards the end of his life, Vincent Craig moved over to London where he was much in demand as a specialist consultant in architecture. He died suddenly on 1 July 1925 at the age of 59.

Eldon Green was sold in 1911 to Herbert Brown and family - a linen merchant from Belfast. The name was changed in 1914 to Rathmoyle - an Irish name. 'Moyle' in Irish is an adjective which means bald, bare or hornless and

is often applied to a church or building of any kind that is either unfinished or dilapidated. As this was hardly the case, it is more likely that the name was chosen to represent its site, as 'moyle' may also be used to designate a mound with a flat top or dilapidated by having the materials carted away. Perhaps Herbert Brown was confused as the materials were carted to Rathmoyle. 'Rath' simply means townland.

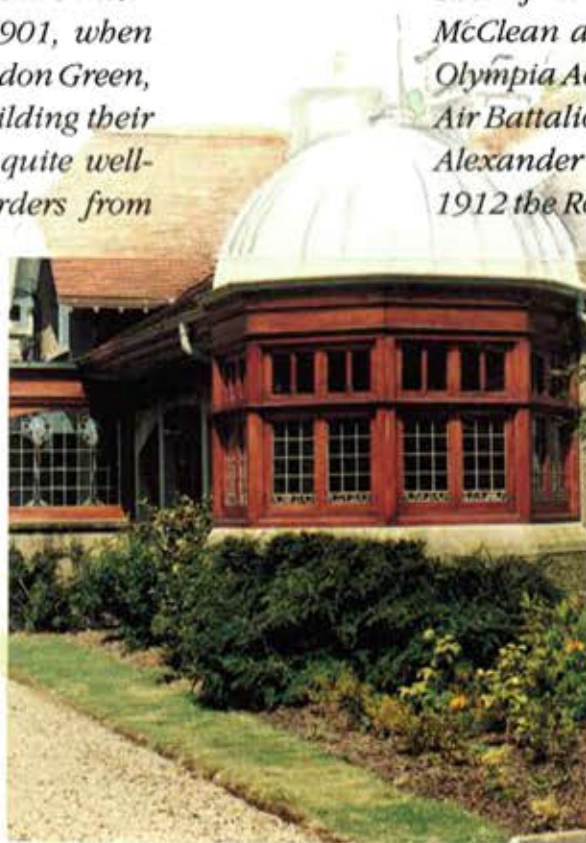


The three Short brothers, Horace, Eustace and Oswald, were born into a middle-class English family. Their father, Samuel, was the manager and chief engineer of the Little Chilton Colliery in County Durham. Although all three were highly intelligent men, it was Horace who stood out among them.

C. G. Grey, who was the editor of the 'Aeroplane' magazine said that he possessed 'the most wonderful versatility of mind, for he was far above the mental level of the ordinary adventurous engineer. It was almost impossible to produce a subject about which Horace Short did not know as much as the leading authority on the subject.'



The three brothers first became involved in the idea of manned flight through Eustace and Oswald's interest in aerial balloons. In 1901, when Vincent Craig was building Eldon Green, Eustace and Oswald were building their first balloon. They became quite well-known and won several orders from influential sources such as the Indian Government. 1901 was also the year in which the Aero Club was formed by the Hon Charles Stewart Rolls and Frank Hedges Butler amongst others. In 1906 Eustace and Oswald became official engineers to the Club. Being in such close contact with the club members, it was perhaps inevitable that the brothers should be drawn into the emergent powered flight phenomenon. The Wright brothers first gave demonstrations of powered flight in France in August 1908. Amongst those who were given the opportunity to fly on 8 October 1908 were Rolls and Hedges Butler. Inspired by their enthusiasm, Eustace Short was taken up by the Wrights, on 5 December 1908, and a legend was born.



The brothers set up their partnership to build 'planes in November 1908 and were registered as Short Brothers. Their first 'plane was built for Frank McClean and was exhibited at the first Olympia Aero Show in 1909. In 1911 an Air Battalion was set up under Major Sir Alexander Bannerman and on 13 April 1912 the Royal Flying Corps was created by Royal Warrant. It has been said that the early years of the Short Brothers partnership represented the history of early British naval aviation and, when the first world war broke out in 1914, the Company concentrated on seaplane production, developing 'planes capable of carrying torpedoes, and in 1917 patrol and bomber planes. Horace Short died at the age of 44 on 4 April 1917 from a cerebral haemorrhage. He was considered to have been one of the foremost aeronautical engineers of his day. When the war was over the Short Brothers Company was praised for the part it and its seaplanes had played in the winning of the war both in Europe and also in places further afield, such as Lake Tanganyika in Africa.

An abundance of flowering shrubs enhances the spacious grounds.





The period between the wars was one of change, not only for the Short Brothers Company which was adapting to a contracting post-war market and developing commercial as well as military 'planes, but also for the residents of North Down. The Brown family sold Rathmoyle to the Mitchell family in 1927 and they themselves moved into another house in Helen's Bay called Tordeevra. Captain W C Mitchell, the new owner, was the Managing Director of a wine importing firm which was called Mitchell and Co Ltd, and had its headquarters in Corporation Street, Belfast. Despite the problems which were occurring in the late 1920's and early 1930's, with the economic depression and rising unemployment, the estate attached to Rathmoyle flourished and the Belfast and District Directory of 1931 listed not only the Mitchell family but also a J Magee as resident at Rathmoyle House and John Jamison and Samuel McDowell as residents in Rathmoyle Cottages. Inclusion in the directory was based on local electoral roles for the local councils.



In the earlier days of Shorts ownership Rathmoyle was used for radar and missile testing, activities which have long since been transferred to another location.

In June 1936 a new joint company was set up in Belfast by Short Brothers and the shipbuilders Harland and Wolff. The new company was called Short and Harland and was fully able to take advantage of the massive rebuilding programme of the RAF in the scramble to prepare for war. First aircraft types built at Belfast were the Bombay and Hereford, followed later by the Sunderland and Stirling.

The Short and Harland firm played a vital role during the 1939-45 war and the then owners of Rathmoyle House also played their part in the war effort. Captain William Mitchell, as well as being one of the owners of Mitchell & Sons Ltd was also a serving officer in the Royal Irish Rifles. He was invalided out of the army in the mid-1930's but re-enlisted on the outbreak of war in 1939. Unfortunately he was not allowed to rejoin his regiment but instead rose to the rank of Major in the Pay Corps. His son, Lieutenant Dunsmere Mitchell lived in the house for a few years before his marriage when he moved to Carrowdore Castle. Major Mitchell moved to a house in Dundrum.





Although some Anglo-Normans were successful in settling the area, for example the Savage family (later called Nugent) who kept control of the lower half of the Ards peninsula and who, until recently, lived in Portaferry House, the northern coastline of Down was retained by a branch of the O'Neills of Clanaboye. It was a descendant of these O'Neills, Brian MacPhelim O'Neill who c.1570 rose in rebellion against Elizabeth I of England when she gave his lands to Sir Thomas Smith. He burnt most of the churches in the area to deny shelter to the English troops sent by Sir Thomas Smith to secure his gift.

The O'Neills kept possession of their land until Coni McNeill MacBrien O'Neill gave two-thirds of it away c.1620. Con O'Neill was something of a wastrel and he lost his land through a series of mishaps. He was entertaining some guests, among them a Hugh Montgomery, when he realised that he was running short of wine, so he sent his servants to fetch some more. On their way back they were set

upon by some drunken English soldiers who attempted to relieve them of their master's wine. A scuffle ensued which resulted in a couple of deaths. Con O'Neill was held to blame for his servants' behaviour and was put in prison in Carrickfergus Castle charged with treason. One of his guests, Hugh Montgomery, offered to

help him escape and he, together with another Scottish adventurer called James Hamilton, acted as an intermediary for Con with King James I and VI. Con was pardoned and in return he gave Montgomery and Hamilton each one-third of his land. He soon lost the rest through gambling and debts. James Hamilton received most of North Down and also the town

of Killyleagh (whose present-day Baron and Baroness are the Duke and Duchess of York) and Hugh Montgomery received the Ards peninsula (excluding those areas owned and controlled by the Savages) and the important coastal town of Donaghadee, then one of three main ports of entry into Ireland.



Picturesque Crawfordsburn village and country park are among the many local attractions in the vicinity of Rathmoyle. The local craft shop in Crawfordsburn is a favourite stop for many visitors to Northern Ireland.

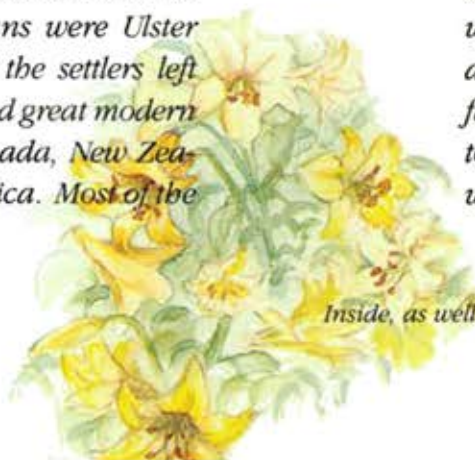
The land which both men were awarded was not one flowing with milk and honey, as Brian MacPhelim O'Neill had

followed a scorched earth policy in the late sixteenth century when he thought that he was to be deprived of his land and his successors were hardly improving landlords. As a result of this both Hamilton and Montgomery encouraged the settlement of their new land by Scottish farmers and craftsmen. This is the reason why most of the natives of the area still speak with a relatively soft Scottish-type accent. The predominant religion among these settlers was Presbyterianism and this area was one of the main centres for the United Irishmen's movement in the 1790's. Presbyterians were as restricted under the Penal Laws as their Roman Catholic compatriots and the nature of Presbyterianism is such that many were attracted to radicalism. The first true Irish Republicans were Ulster Presbyterians. Many of the settlers left these shores to help to found great modern democracies such as Canada, New Zealand and, of course, America. Most of the

men who signed the Declaration of Independence and helped to compose the Bill of Rights and American Constitution were originally from Ulster Presbyterian stock.

The social and economic history of the area in the nineteenth century was one of expansion, both of industry and urbanisation. One of the main areas for expansion was in the production of linen which had far reaching effects in all areas of society. Most of the North Down area had escaped the ravages of the famine but those areas which were worst affected were places such as Carrowdore where there was a great number of handloom weavers. They were already being placed under great economic strain due to the develop-

ment and growth of factories and this, coupled with the failure of the potato crop, forced many to migrate to the larger towns of Belfast and Newtownards. This was not, however, the end of the districts association with textiles. The area was famous for its embroidered linen. Every town and village had at least one agent who was usually employed by a linen



Inside, as well as out, the house maintains much of its original Edwardian elegance.





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SCALE IN METRES





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