



Lecale & Downe
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
'EXPLORING OUR HERITAGE'

First Meeting of The Downe Society

From Down Recorder, Saturday 24th January 1948

LIFE IN DOWN

UNFOLDING THE PAST

COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

Last night in Denvir's Hotel the newly formed cultural Downe Society held its opening public meeting. To a goodly attendance the object of the Society were explained, and new members were enrolled.

Very fittingly, as the first subject for the session, 'The Story of Downpatrick', with illustrations, was told by Mr R.E. Parkinson. And he did so with the fullness of knowledge to be expected from one so studious who in 1928 published a valuable local history based on materials assiduously collected by his deceased father, a citizen whose memory is still cherished.

Mr Parkinson spoke of man reaching Ireland some seven thousand years ago; of successive settlements in the dark ages; megalithic and other memorials in the country; tribal forays of long ago; the less remote ravages of the Norsemen; the early Christian and Norman periods, and especially the part played by de Courcy. From Celthar of the Battles is derived 'Rathkeltair', Downpatrick's earliest name, until it was superseded by 'Dunlethglas', the modern 'Down'.

In 1392 Richard II led an army into Ireland, and received the submission of all the chiefs. In his train came one Janico d'Artois, a Gascon knight, who succeeded in obtaining for himself a substantial estate in Lecale, and to him is probably due the rise of Ardglass. In 1441 Archbishop Prene, writing to the King, calls Downpatrick a royal city.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century the position of the English colony here was desperate, as shown in a piteous petition addressed to the King, praying for aid. In 1512, to such a state had the town been reduced that the Bishop Tiberius, suppressed the Cistercian nunnery of Down, the monasteries of St John, of St Thomas the Martyr, and of the Irish of Down,



Mr Richard Edward Parkinson, founding member of The Downe Society

the rectory of Ardglass, the prebends of Ros and of Ballykilbeg, and the chapel of St Mary Magdalene, and annexed their revenues to the restoration and support of the Cathedral, which, he says was then gone to ruins in walls and roof. O'Laverty suggests that it was only possible to rebuild the choir, and that the nave and transepts remained unrestored, and so have disappeared.

During the Wars of the Roses the Fitzgeralds, Earls of Kildare, became the most powerful family in Ireland, and indeed, its virtual rulers. The property in Lecale of Janico d'Artois came to them by marriage with his granddaughter, and eventual heiress, and they are still represented by their descendant, Lady de Ros.

Having indicated how Lecale was laid waste during the campaigns of O'Neill and his ally O'Donnell, the lecturer went on to notice the advent successively of the titled Cromwell family and the Southwell family, and how under the latter

Downpatrick made considerable progress. In passing mention was made of Alan Mullen, who, born at Ballyculter in 1654, attended school in the town, graduated in Trinity College, and became one of the leading surgeons and physicians in Ireland.

No charter for Downpatrick is known to exist. There is extant a list from 1613 of the two members regularly returned to the Irish Parliament, none of them, however, at all eminent. A representative of the borough from 1660 to 1665, Daniel O'Neill, son and heir of Con of Castlereagh, in spite of his intimate friendship with both Charles I and Charles II was unable to wrest any of his patrimony from the Hamiltons and Montgomeries. Charles II wrote on 24th October 1668: 'Poor O'Neale died this afternoon of an ulcer in his guts; he was as honest a man as ever lived: I am sure I have lost a very good

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Whole work, open to any type of tractor plough : 1 and the club's challenge cup, R. J. Carse, Killinure, 785 points ; 2 W. Prentice, Carricknaveigh, 720 points ; 3 J. Orr, Ballyhossett, 430 points. Best back, W. Prentice Best hint, R. J. Carse.
Everyday work, confined to trailer ploughs : 1 W. Crea, Ringawoody, 560 points ; 2 J. Montgomery, Killough, 535 points ; 3 G. Chambers, Killough, 530 points. Special prizes in this class confined to club members, won by the same three.
Everyday work, confined to hydraulic lift ploughs : 1 W. L. M'Millan, Dundonald, 780 points ; 2 H. Hyland, entered by H. Ferguson, Belfast, 750 points ; 3 Robin Gill, Sheeplandmore, 710 points. Same class, confined to club members : 1 and Elliott cup, Robin Gill ; 2 G. Davidson, Bishops-court ; 3 J. M. Hay, Clough.
Everyday work, confined to horse ploughs : 1 W. J. M'Sherry, entered by A. M'Evoy, Killough, 782 points ; 2 T. Millar, entered by H. Caven, Ballyhossett, 610 points ; 3 N. Walsh,

economic policy is regarded as a direct denial of the right of the Commonwealth to exist, and calls servant by it'. After the Union representation was reduced to one member of the Imperial Parliament, until the constituency was abolished by the Franchise Act of 1885.

A glimpse of the town in the seventeenth century was given: the old castle on the site of the present post office: 'a good convenient sessions house'; near by, the workhouse and the house of correction. And a glimpse too of the savagery of the law, when, at the assizes, the condemned, whether for stealing at Newry a keg of butter worth 10s, or the carrying away from Finnebrogue of six cocks of oats worth 6s 8d apiece, were sentenced to death by hanging.

Magistrates too in those days exercised powers of drastic punishment. Stocks and a pillory stood in the centre of the town. A man, stripped to the waist, was flogged from the gaol gate to the end of the town, and afterwards imprisoned for removing a coping stone from a bridge in the demesne of one of the nobility. Several unfortunate insurgents in '98 were hanged here. The last execution in public took place only just over eighty years ago.

The Southwells were enlightened landlords. Quoile quay, with bonded stores, was built about 1717; then, in 1745, the custom house, now the residence of Mr Samuel Pyper in English Street. The Blue Coat Schools for the education of ten poor boys and ten poor girls, with the Alms-houses for six old men and six old women, were built in 1733. They were endowed by a rent charge on the lands and mill of Ballydian, but depreciation in the value of money caused the schools to be amalgamated with those of the National Board in 1888. One of the Southwells also undertook the reclamation of the marshes.

Lord Bangor's son, Edward Ward, is still in Poland. Yesterday he was heard to say in a composite radio talk that Poland is exporting 5,000 tons of coal a week to Britain, one of whose chief industries is coal-mining. The screening, picking and mechanical cleaning of the stuff that reaches Northern Ireland might be improved.

Son of Mr A. J. H. Coulter J.P., Rathcuan, Pilot-officer Louis C. H. Coulter, R.A.F., now on furlough, is to be congratulated on an appointment by the Colonial Office to the Government of Nyasaland. He joined the R.A.F. in 1937, under the age of 17, and had continuous war service in the East, India and Africa, until he was recalled to London in 1947 for commissioning.

On the platform with Rev. M. Baillie, B.D., at a special temperance meeting in Fountain-street school on Wednesday were Revs. W. Buchanan and J. Radcliffe. In the course of a lecture Rev. Nevin Lyons, of Chancellor

upshot of a Y.F.C. inter-club quiz at Kiltree on Wednesday.

Built in the 1660's the cavalry barracks, the Saul Terrace of today, were purchased in 1774 from the Barracks Board for £150, and converted into the County Infirmary, an institution rebuilt some way off in 1834.

On the establishment of the Down Royal Corporation Horse Breeders, in 1685, race meetings each lasting a week were held at the old course, followed by evening revelry in the Market House, now displaced by the Assembly Hall.

In the eighteenth century the roads were poor. Mrs Delany, wife of the then Dean, noted in her diary that it took an hour and three-quarters to travel from Mountpanther to Downpatrick by her new coach and six. Judges and barristers journeyed on horseback. Chaises were owned by a few the gentry. Tea was an almost unknown luxury. Wines were imported. Beer was the chief beverage. There were five breweries in the town, and seven or eight publicans brewed for their own houses. A distillery was also carried on.

Christmas and Hallowe'en were duly celebrated. Easter Monday saw sports at the Mount. May Day was spent in dancing round the maypole, eighteen or twenty being set up in various parts of the town. Cock fighting was a favourite amusement. So too was bull-baiting at the Shambles.

The closing words were on urban administration today with a sense of the historic past and the hope of future well-being.

The fact has already been mentioned that one of the Maple Leaf team who will be seen in the ploughing international at Saintfield on 11th February is a Red Indian. Now we learn that Boardmills is to furnish a woman competitor, the first ever entered for an event of the kind.

The death of Mr W. M' Clements, who retired last year from the principalship of Magheraknock school, is regretted by many friends, especially in Masonic and golfing circles.

Official correspond- Killyleagh. ence on the proposed setting up by Kilmood Nursing Society of a child welfare clinic and nurse's residence at Lisbarnett has been referred to the new Health Committee. Statutorily they become responsible for such services, 'either by employing nurses and midwives, or by making arrangements with voluntary organisations which employ them.' The

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