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Conservation Campaign
Summer 2010

The Cave Hill CAMPAIGNER



ANNUAL REPORT

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This has been a relatively quiet, uneventful year on Cave Hill. There have been no large contentious issues or conflicts. This is not to assert that there are no problems; concerns still exist about dog-fouling, underage drinking around the periphery of the Park, litter, petty vandalism, path erosion, mountain bikes and scramblers. Work on these by the City Council is ongoing but regrettably slow.

One issue has been resolved. Those who visited the area of McArt's Fort since the autumn of last year cannot have failed to notice the two information plaques erected by the Council. These fulfil a need for information at the top of the Hill and as such, we welcomed their advent. But we deplored their siting; viewed from below, particularly from around the Abbeycentre, they protrude above the skyline and detract from that special profile. We passed on our concerns and I'm pleased to report that the plaques have been moved so that they will be less obtrusive.

In parallel with that and with the same aim, we offer a talk on Cave Hill to any interested group; last year, I visited a local primary school and also gave a talk to a local Probus group.

This last year also saw the publication of John Gray's booklet on the *1859 Rights of Way* case. The evidence produced in that landmark case casts a strong light on Cave Hill and those who lived on or visited it in the middle of the nineteenth century. John Gray has sifted and collated this information and has produced a very readable and informative piece of work. It is available from local outlets and direct from us, and I urge anyone with more than a passing interest in the Hill to purchase a copy.

The biggest event on the Hill last year was the launch of the *Friends of the Belfast Hills* organisation in July. The Belfast Hills Partnership organised an event in the course of which a staircase was built to the first Cave and over eight hundred people took advantage of it. Three officials of the Partnership and I also dressed in Edwardian costume to commemorate a famous picture taken around the beginning of the twentieth century of a lady in crinolines with two male companions sitting

twirling her parasol in the mouth of the Cave. Other members of the Campaign helped in 'crowd control'. (Anyone who wishes to find out more about becoming a Friend of the Belfast Hills, should go to the website: www.belfasthills.org/helping_hand.php)

In April we launched a new initiative. We have decided to offer our services to the public in a bid to increase knowledge of and interest in Cave Hill so that more people can enjoy it. To that end, we have organised a programme of guided walks on the third Saturday morning of each month from April to October, (Details of the walks and contacts may be found elsewhere in this magazine). Walks are free to members; non-members will be charged a small fee. If this year's programme is successful we hope that it may become an annual event.
Cormac Hamill

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Chairman: Cormac Hamill

Editor: Edward McCamley

Please visit our website at www.cavehillconservation.org

All correspondence welcome by email to:

Info@cavehillconservation.org

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SEE NOW THE DAWN

A year ago I joined a group of intrepid nature lovers to experience the dawn chorus on the Cave Hill. It was 5 o'clock in the morning and the expedition was led by Larry Toal from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency; we stood for a while and listened to what was already something of a cacophony of tweets and twittering. I am no expert in bird identification and it was a bit frustrating when Larry drew attention to the calls of chiff-chaffs, robins, wood pigeons, blackbirds, dunnocks etc. with bewildering confidence whilst I failed to distinguish more than the odd chiff-chaff. Anyway, we rambled through the park and up to the old quarry, with Larry calling out any particular bird calls he felt to be of particular interest, but try as I might, my senses continued to be baffled by the profusion of other calls. I was beginning to think regretfully of my cosy bed.

After an hour or so, Larry wondered aloud if we were able for a bit more, as he wanted to try for a bird that is quite a rarity. I choked back my protests and tramped on in his wake as we headed up toward the caves. Having reached the Camel Humps, we doubled back into the forest and moved across the side of the hill under the high canopy of tall beeches. Feeling assured that the climbing was over and moving easily in this cool, quiet, twilight world, Larry explained that he had heard a wood warbler in this area recently. These birds are the least common of the *Phylloscopus* warblers and extremely rare in Ireland; Larry reckoned this was a male blown over from Scotland and looking for a mate – he would probably hang around for a week or two and then head back over the sea. In fact, he wasn't sure if it hadn't already gone. Suddenly he stopped and raised a finger, a large grin spreading over his face. Then we heard a very loud and distinctive song. It was like a slow trill that accelerated and then spluttered and petered out. It has often been described as resembling the sound of a coin spinning on a marble slab, and it is delightful to be able to testify that that is indeed an accurate description. Having felt tired and bad-tempered at not being able to distinguish one call from another, here was both recompense and gift. I felt privileged to be able to stand beneath that tall canopy with the light filtering through, listening to those delicious notes dropping repeatedly through the leaves like rain.

A year on, I decided to interview Larry Toal to see if I could take another step forward in my ornithological education. He came to my house and sat patiently for an hour and a half and never laughed once at my ignorance. Larry used to be a teacher in West Belfast and I could see that he must have been a very patient and inspiring educator. I asked what birds a person might expect to find on the Cave Hill

other than those one might see in the garden. He said there was little that was really spectacular, but that this was to be expected; the bird enthusiast will travel widely to see rare birds, but the birds on your doorstep are your 'bread and butter', the birds you get to know intimately. These include robin, crow, chiff-chaff, thrush, blackbird, chaffinches, great tit, long-tailed tit, coal tit, blue tit, grasshopper warbler (to be seen around the quarry), and sometimes a stone chat at the back of the hill, toward the north end.

"Then there are the buzzards in Carr's Glen and jays in the wooded area, recognisable by a white rump and a wee bit of blue as well as its chattering call. We've got sparrowhawks – two or three pair – and kestrels too – up at McArt's Fort and in the old quarry facing the Hightown Road car park. In the spring up on top we've a good number of skylark (about five pair) and meadow pipit. Most winters we've a good chance of seeing snow buntings – down from Norway or Iceland or Northern Scotland. There are wood pigeon and collar doves aplenty. Collar doves are an eruption into Ireland – they like villages – we've hoped waxwings will do the same. Another is the crossbill; but they need large conifer plantations and Cave Hill doesn't have that – except maybe the wee plantation near the Hightown Road car park. It has a crossed bill to open pine cones. There's the linnet too, with its nice plumage in the spring – flushed with pink it is. And Red Poll – there are a few of those, but you find a lot more up the Antrim Coast."

A particularly interesting bird is the long-eared owl which breeds behind Belfast Castle. They're not particularly rare, but because they're nocturnal people rarely see them. "Used to be, when the country park was less overgrown, you could walk more freely off the path and you could climb up above the tree line and look down into trees and see the nests, but that's harder to do now with all the undergrowth. Now, I just listen for the call around dusk. At the moment there are two pairs holding territory. One pair near the path below McArt's fort and another just above the trees at the turnstile at the old limestone quarry. The females have been calling and the males have been calling. The males have been displaying" – he claps his wings in flight display. "There's a bit of hard work to see them".

"The snow buntings – you need to walk the hill regularly in the winter at a time when people aren't walking dogs. They're like a wee finch and there's a lot of white on them. You'll see them usually in a flock of about 20 – they like the hilltop. They're up there feeding on seeds from grasses and reeds from November through to February."

Particularly interesting to Larry are the ravens that nest above the old caves and have been there for years. "Great big bird – nest-builds early. The raven is such a big bird – same wingspan as a buzzard. They have different calls – when they're flying together in display they'll frequently close the wings and tumble. And they call out – they have a cackle of a call and they live to a good age. And I think they're monogamous. And there's jackdaws there in crevices as well. At dusk you'll hear a lot of chat and that's mostly from jackdaw."

What started him off as a bird watcher? "My Da worked in a garage and he lived in Ardoyne, in Havana St. He loved the countryside and going out looking for bird's nests. The urban areas backed on to fields and mountain and the young lads were fond of going looking for bird's nests. My Dad he loved nest hunting, and when he got a job as a tea boy in a garage and worked his way up he had access to an old car, so he used to take us up to the Glens and walking the roads looking out for birds. So I loved that and I developed it and



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then I took to the open country.” Did he teach you to spot birds? “No, I did that myself. I got binoculars and the association of hearing them and seeing them – you know, you got to know what was what after a while. And you hid your binoculars of course – didn’t want people to think you were a bit of an anorak.”

What would you say was the highlight of your bird-spotting career? “Probably about 1971 – seeing a barn owl in Glencairn. Up the back of the Glencairn estate, up near Ligoniel. Very rare to see a barn owl in Ireland – like hen’s teeth – a very threatened species.”

Larry works now for the Biodiversity Unit in NIEA and is concerned with the conservation, protection and enhancement of habitats. Has he any future plans or ambitions in his area of interest? “No, just hope I keep my health so I can continue to do what I do. I’m not looking for rare birds, I like the familiar. When I retire I’d like to do more survey work and contribute more to the database of bird distribution in the Belfast area, in the Antrim area, in Northern Ireland. It would be nice to take groups out ... to work with school kids, but it takes a lot of energy. I did that and I don’t know if I’ve got the energy anymore.”

A week after my own encounter with the wood warbler, I took my wife up to where we had heard it with Larry. I didn’t think we would have much chance of hearing it after what he had said, but it would be nice in any case to introduce her to a part of the hill we didn’t really know. To our surprise and delight, I managed to find my way back to that place with its tall beeches and there it was, still calling from its high perch with that delicious cascade of notes. In the words of Edward Thomas, it was “as if, overhead in the stainless air, little waves of pearls dropped and scattered and shivered on a shore of pearls.”

John Gribbin

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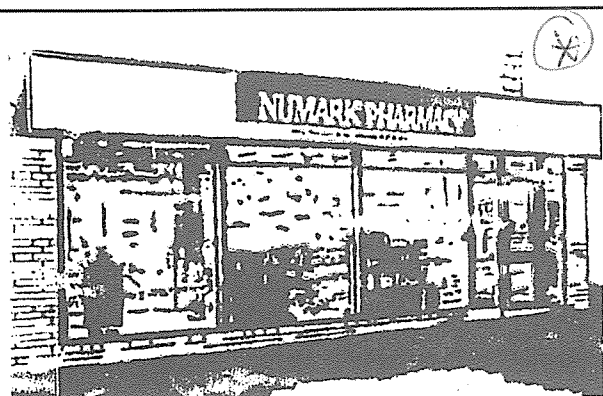
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A SPONSORED WALK

Elsewhere in this issue of the Campaigner may be found details of the new series of guided walks that the Cavehill Conservation Campaign intends to sponsor as a means of stimulating an interest in the natural and social history of the area.

Pupils from a local school, Belfast Royal Academy, have participated in a sponsored walk over the Cave Hill for some years. The residents of the Antrim Road area have since become accustomed to Spring being ushered in not so much by the warmer weather as by about a thousand colourfully attired enthusiasts labouring across the skyline, some making three circuits, the maximum permitted.

The first such walk was undertaken in 1974 when over a thousand pupils and staff of the school raised, in those days the not inconsiderable sum of £3,563 as a contribution to the amount required to build a swimming pool for the Academy. Result: instant "tradition".

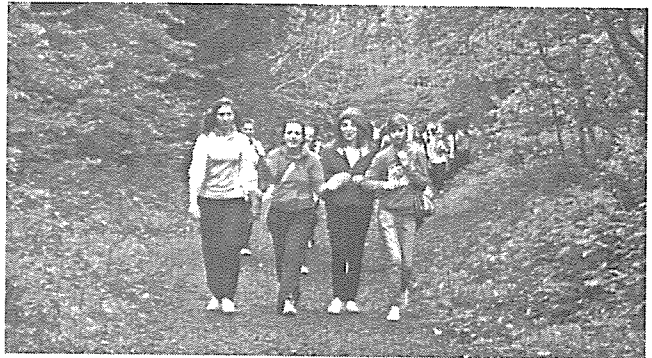
So successful – and popular – was this initiative, that it was decided to continue with the sponsored walk and to donate the sums of money thus raised, to designated charities or other good causes.

In 1978 the proceeds were devoted to helping with the medical requirements of a pupil who had been seriously injured while playing rugby. This boy, whose courage and good humour in the face of adversity impressed all who witnessed it, successfully completed his studies at the Academy and later, as a law student at Queen's University, travelled to California to examine the practical application of American law concerning the disabled, particularly in the provision of education, employment, transport and leisure

facilities. He spent over two months in North America, visiting Washington D.C, Ohio State University, San Diego, and Edmonton in Canada. In the following year David Gray graduated from Queen's.

Since then all the money raised has gone to charities. This year, the beneficiaries of the 37th Sponsored Walk were: the Alzheimer's Society, Embrace NI, Habitat for Humanity, and The Mulanje Project in Malawi.

E McCamley



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TROUBLE AT THE HILL

Commenting on his arrival back in Belfast after the daily grind as a Television Presenter in our sister island, Eamonn Holmes recently described his affectionate response to Cave Hill, which, as he points out, is the most prominent landmark in the city and often the first thing that visitors see.

Mr Holmes, would, no doubt, be gratified to know that the Cavehill Conservation Campaign continues with the work of preserving, and where possible, enhancing this historic area, and, in cooperation with Belfast City Council, the adjoining Castle Estate. Originally brought into existence in order to counter threats to Cave Hill from commercial exploitation, the Campaign now promotes such activities as tree-planting, litter clearance and protection of bio-diversity.

Challenges to the integrity of the area multiply with each passing season. As the Cave Hill Country Park becomes increasingly popular as a tourist attraction, and as a recreational area for Belfast's citizens, the dispiriting prevalence of litter presents a continuing problem that can only be contained by unrelenting clearance. Plastic bottles, supermarket bags and tin cans are only the most visible evidence of the presence of those whose thought processes in discarding such junk in woodland and heath are difficult to fathom.

The Cavehill Conservation Campaign has, for some time now, organised an annual CleanUp Cave Hill Day and the Council provides the skip, protective gloves, bags and litter pickers. The *Belfast Telegraph* presently sponsors a Big Clean-Up campaign (www.tidynorthernireland.org) with which we are delighted to be associated. As the newspaper

has pointed out, this is one issue which all the main political parties have been pleased to support. And the small band of volunteers who meet each May to help maintain Cave Hill and its surroundings in the way in which most visitors may imagine it, and most residents would like to see it, would welcome all the help that can be mustered in order to preserve this especially important part of our neighbourhood.

Recently of course there has been a more ominous threat to Cave Hill. Arsonists – and there is no more accurate term – have caused enormous damage to many heathlands in Northern Ireland, the Belfast Hills, and to Cave Hill itself. The newsletter of the Belfast Hills Partnership (www.belfasthills.org) has drawn particular attention to an environmental menace which has caused so much destruction of huge areas of habitat. For those unmoved by such arguments, Dermot McCann and Dr Jim Bradley, who have been carefully monitoring these fires, warn that apart from the environmental impact, this malign practice, if not checked, will inevitably lead to serious injury or loss of life. Cave Hill, which has been targeted, is perhaps especially vulnerable because of the small extent of its area, the presence of adjacent wooded areas, and the proximity of the Castle and nearby homes. Recent, and persistent, arson attacks on Cave Hill serve as a reminder of the danger.

It is essential therefore that all who use Cave Hill as a recreational area, or who live in the vicinity, should be especially vigilant in reporting outbreaks of arsonism to the PSNI and the Fire Service. Additionally, of course, one could render assistance with this as well as other activities by joining us through our new email address ([info @ cavehillconservation.org](mailto:info@cavehillconservation.org)) at our re-launched website www.cavehillconservation.org.

Edward McCamley

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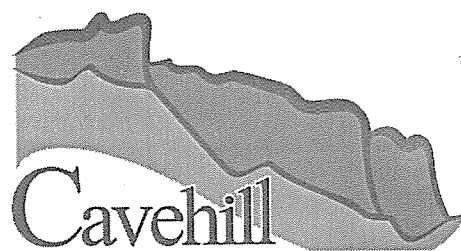
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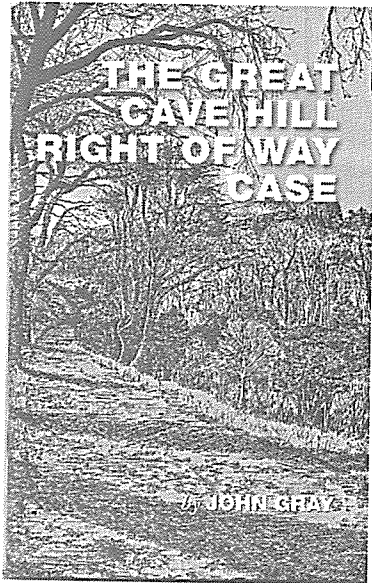
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The past year has been conspicuous for the publication of an unusually high number of books on Cave Hill and its environs. The Campaigner is pleased to present here a review article in which four of these books are considered.

THE GREAT CAVE HILL RIGHT OF WAY CASE

John Gray



This is a 48 page booklet written by John Gray, former Chairman of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign and recently retired as Librarian of the Linen Hall Library. It was published in February this year and marks the 150th anniversary of a famous legal case in which a prosecution was brought against a local landowner by the name of Joseph Magill. The case was brought by a group of 68 Belfast citizens who had constituted themselves as the Association for the Protection of Public Rights of Way, in response to the loss of access to the Cave Hill by what was then the most used route. Through marriage, Magill had come into ownership of a large area of land facing the top of Gray's Lane. He was an up and coming merchant, and he decided to build a substantial house and gate lodge, which he named Martlett Towers and Martlett Lodge. The gate lodge was built across what was then the traditional path, and Magill also fenced off much of the area behind, including the Volunteers' Well. The case was brought when he failed to re-open the route in response to written requests from the Association. Magill was prosecuted for "obstructing a certain common Queen's highway leading from the Whitehouse or Shore Road ... to a well called The Volunteers' Well and then continuing as a common footway leading from this well to the Cave Hill, by building a porter's lodge and putting up embankments." He was found guilty at the County Antrim Spring Assizes in 1858, but took the case to appeal before a special jury in Belfast in August 1859. The case attracted great attention and a full account was published subsequently by the *Northern Whig*. After hearing five days of evidence, the jury found Magill guilty of eight of the sixteen charges, and he was compelled to re-open the traditional path, making a new entrance beside the gate lodge. But Magill was a sore loser, and the book details how he did his best to discourage people from using the re-opened path. In subsequent years his

businesses suffered financially, and after his death in 1882 his land was purchased by the Donegall family and added to the Belfast Castle estate. Martlett Towers is long gone, but Martlett Lodge survives at the foot of the path facing the top of Gray's Lane.

The case provides us with a major source of social and economic history of this part of Belfast in the first half of the nineteenth century. Evidence was brought to show that the disputed path formed part of an ancient route between Whitehouse (then a major industrial centre) and Glenavy. (It needs to be remembered that at this time the Cave Hill had virtually no tree cover.) Other evidence concerned the extent to which the Cave Hill was a major recreational centre for the citizens of Belfast, especially on public holidays, when large, boisterous crowds gathered. Thanks to Magill's defeat, the right of public access was retained and was greatly expanded in 1934 when the Belfast Castle estate was donated by the Donegalls to the city of Belfast.

This is a really good read for anyone interested in the Cave Hill and the local history of the area. It costs £5 and has been on sale in several shops in the area close to Belfast Castle, but it can also be ordered from our website at www.cavehillconservation.org

Peter McCloskey

IF TREES COULD TALK

Ben Simon

Enthusiasts for the Cave Hill will particularly appreciate the new light that Ben Simon throws here on the history and evolution of the Deer Park, which eventually formed the core of the Belfast Castle estate. We still know little more about earlier deer parks in the neighbourhood, those at Oldpark, and possibly another at Skegoneill, but here we find detailed evidence of the management of the new Deer Park on the Cave Hill as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Simon has trawled the Donegall archives and found details about early park keepers, including one John Rice who was paid £10 a year and attired in a green uniform adorned with buttons, and lived in a thatched house probably close to the site of the present Castle. This is also the earliest description that we have of anyone working on the Cave Hill.

This account of the Deer Park reminds us of how far even the most apparently natural landscape is man made. Early maps and illustrations with the Cave Hill as a backdrop suggest extensive mature woodland, yet by the 1790s all this was chopped down. Simon proves that the deer survived much longer, and on largely open hillside until they too were sold in 1859, only a few years before the construction of Belfast Castle and the associated re-afforestation of which we are the beneficiaries today.

Simon is equally thorough in his pursuit of the history of other woodlands. Some have long since vanished, such as those in the gardens around the original Belfast Castle, or Cromac Wood. Others survive today such as Belvoir, where Simon locates Belfast's oldest extant tree, an oak dating from 1642, or Colin Glen. Then there are the natural remnant woods high on our surrounding hillsides and as at Hazelwood.

Trees have been losing the battle against urban sprawl for a century or more. In 1926 they covered 2.5 % of the city area but by 1951 a mere 1.3%. Idealistic garden villages, and tree planting along streets provided a limited countervailing tendency, but urban expansion was in any case only part of the story. Following land reform at the beginning of the century, the big estates with their longer term planting strategies were dissipated, and the new generation of owner occupying farmers, while they might plant around the farmhouse, were more likely to sell off timber elsewhere. Even the surviving major woodlands only escaped by the skin of their teeth in the Second World War; on the Cave Hill, at Belvoir, and around Malone House, the value of trees as camouflage for military operations fortunately intervened.

REVIEWS

Moving fast forward Simon charts the revival of the tree planting impetus, and notably from the 1970's onwards. He describes the gradual recognition at government level of its importance, and the greater priority given to tree planting by a now expanded City Council Park's Department, although often in the face of extensive vandalism. An additional thrust was provided by the voluntary sector, as reflected by Forest of Belfast the publishers here.

Even in taking a relatively optimistic view of the outlook now, Simon has to concede new losses, including that of fine city gardens to speculative infill development. He might have added the baleful effect of unfettered speculative development in the unsustainable urban sprawl of outer Belfast and areas like Newtownabbey, Dundonald and Carryduff.

This certainly makes the case for those like Ben Simon who can talk for the trees, when we have been in thrall to a generation of politicians who prefer to talk to developers, and are all too cheaply dismissive of derisively called tree huggers.

This book is all the more fascinating because of the depth of research that has gone into it. It is also beautifully illustrated and produced to the highest standard. It is an absolute bargain for £10.

JOHN GRAY

THE CAVEHILL, BELFAST

Michael McCausland

It is obvious from the foreword that Michael McCausland shares with a lot of us who live in North Belfast a love of Cave Hill. The difference between him and most of the rest of us is that, although he has moved away to the south of England, he has tried to record something of his regard and affection for the Hill.

This book is self-published; thanks to modern technology, it is possible to write a book, design it, and make it available free from the editorial constraints of a conventional publishing house. The book exists in electronic form and then is printed as each order is received. As such it is only available from the publishers.

The lack of a critical eye in production is obvious, for example, from the number of times an apostrophe is used in ordinary plurals. *Chichester's*, *Donegall's* and even *civil defence's* appear annoyingly. And an editor would also have insisted on captions for the photographs on the last sixteen pages.

But vanity publishing need not be all bad. The production values of the book are high. The paper is glossy and full of good quality photographs – 59 of them, all in full colour, varying in size from full page (25 cm by 20 cm) to thumbnail size. As a visual inducement to visit Cave Hill, it works very well.

And that is the problem for someone who knows Cave Hill; the book is really a glorified guidebook and offers little that is not available in leaflets produced by the City Council. The photographs are all modern apart from one of the Floral Hall when it was a dance hall, and another of the Bellevue steps.

There is one section which the author obviously researched himself and he produces some pleasing anecdotes about artefacts recovered from the war time crash of the American B17 bomber. Otherwise, the text reads like a series of guide leaflets stitched together. He is voluble in his praise of Belfast Zoo, more so than most of us, perhaps who might have reservations about the morality of confining tropical animals high on the northern slopes of a damp Irish hill.

There are some factual inaccuracies: Donegall's fortune was not diminished by the cost of building the Castle; it was largely gone by the time he embarked on the building (p18). It had been squandered by the 3rd Marquis's father, George Augustus

Chichester, the 2nd Marquis. Ashley was the son-in-law of the 3rd Marquis, not his son. (p18 also). The Antrim Road area on the slopes of Cave Hill did not get particularly concentrated bombing in the Blitz (p20).

But there is doubtless a market for this book. Its good photographs and anodyne advertising prose make it a suitable souvenir for the tourist. But as such, the present cost is much too high. Mr McCausland should get the City Council to sponsor him and hand the project to a local publishing company for sale at a much reduced cost in tourist outlets.

This book is not the comprehensive survey of Cave Hill I thought it was when first I heard of it. We still await such a work.

Published by (and only available from) Blurb books
www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/1230688

A HISTORY OF ST PETER'S PARISH

Brian Barton

This is a history of St Peter's Church of Ireland church on the Antrim Road beside the Lansdowne Court Hotel.

The detail makes the book, in the first instance, of enormous interest to those who have been associated with the Church. There are details of sermons preached, attendances at various meetings, societies founded and items within the church. The book charts the large drop in attendance at the Church due to the population shifts in this part of North Belfast over the last seventy years, and the last thirty years in particular.

Some of the more recent names mentioned will be known to us personally in North Belfast and the early history features luminaries such as F J Bigger of Ard-Righ on the Antrim Road, a noted antiquarian of his time, along with prominent families such as the Ewarts and the Kinahans and of course the Ashley-Coopers of Belfast Castle. Reading the details here gives a vivid flavour of the times; of the emotional reactions to the casualties of the two World Wars; of the way that middle-class, prosperous society functioned. Rather than the top-down view of events in North Belfast in the twentieth century available in conventional histories, here we get a bottom-up view. There are glimpses of other changes: the break up of the large estates of, for example, Fortwilliam, Low-wood and Parkmount, the growth of the Jewish community and the development of links across different denominations.

The book will appeal also to those who wish to get a broader view; to anyone, in fact, with any degree of interest in Cave Hill area and matters associated with it. There is a very good introductory chapter on the place of Cave Hill in Belfast history and the role of the Donegall family and there is later, a chapter of 18 pages devoted to the sad history of the Chapel of the Resurrection off Innisfayle Park. It was once the private chapel of the Donegalls. It was transferred to the Church of Ireland in 1938 and became the responsibility of St Peter's. In the financial details of the struggle to maintain it in the face of increasing vandalism, we see the inevitable decline to the state it is now in, fated to become three luxury apartments.

The broad historical brush-strokes in this book, while useful, are obtainable elsewhere. What gives it value now and even more so in the future is the wealth of detail. Such detail could otherwise only be obtained by a laborious trawl through the primary sources. Let us be grateful to Brian Barton for his work, let us buy the book and let us pass it on to generations to come as a rich historical resource.

Cormac E Hamill

Another Belfast is imagined

Cave Hill is identified with so many aspects of Belfast's history, ancient and modern, that, at this important moment in its development, we now consider it opportune to draw the attention of our readership to a summary of an unsettling but very important article on the city published recently in the *Irish Times*. *The Cavehill Conservation Campaign* has, over the years of its existence, challenged any development which threatened the integrity of Cave Hill, and drawn attention to other aspects of urban blight or decay which adversely affects the lives of those who live in or near the city. It is the spirit of this that, as a major conservation group, we think that interested citizens should be aware of the work of a group of Belfast architects who wish to rebuild confidence in a city that they insist is, "riddled with holes" – vast chunks, they say, of empty spaces and waste ground that tell a story of decline and neglect.

The Forum for Alternative Belfast is an independent group of architects, academics and planners established by two local architects, Declan Hill and Mark Hackett. They argue that Belfast has become "a dysfunctional, disconnected place, suffering from a legacy of neglect, and desperately in need of dramatic intervention... a city without a heart, a place where people go to work, shop or play but then return home again, leaving the centre cheerless, sinister and deserted at night."

Earlier this year, at Belfast City Hall, the Forum launched a detailed map entitled *The Missing City*, which shows the empty sites the architects refer to. The red parts of the map add up more than two square kilometres of wasted land – an area the size of 500 football pitches.

Hill and Hackett maintain that Belfast was "un-built" by the creation of roads that were not needed. This has transformed the city into a car dependent mess from which a considerable section of the population has fled. The population, they point out, has decreased by 35% in 35 years and in consequence many primary schools, libraries and churches have closed. This loss of 130,000 people has had a profound impact on the social fabric of Belfast.

To alter this situation bold imaginative steps should be taken and the people who live in Belfast must create the city that they want: a "filled-up" city where today's bleak, litter-strewn spaces are filled with family homes and busy street life, neighbourhood shops and schools; a walkable city, with tree-lined streets and ground floor buildings; a city without, not only the traditional sectarian barriers, but also the barriers between the communities of the wealthy and the benighted zones of the poor.

This, as the article by Fionola Meredith points out, is a beguiling vision of a new Belfast which is not just a call for the repair of neglect, but about, "stitching the city together again, a fundamental restructuring and rebuilding of urban confidence... which will result in a more coherent city that people will want to live in; a regenerated city that is open, connected and vibrant."

While acknowledging that this would involve a thirty year commitment by Belfast's administrators the authors' position is not just aspirational. At the moment they are lobbying to transform Bank Square, described as a bleak, neglected and functionless area just behind a Tesco store on Royal Avenue, into the best urban space in the city. "All the ingredients are there for an amazing square," they say, with "Belfast's first Catholic church, built as a gift by Belfast Presbyterians," and nearby, Belfast's oldest pub and an award-winning restaurant. Additionally, Hill and Hackett want nearby Berry Street – an ancient street, crudely walled-off when Castle Court was built in the 1980s – to be reopened as an active thoroughfare, full of shops and cafes contributing to a transformed square. Declan Hill insists, "I've travelled to other European cities... I've seen how they work. And I think – why can't Belfast have a bit of that?"

You've read it here first, but the full text can be found at: www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2010/0313/122426

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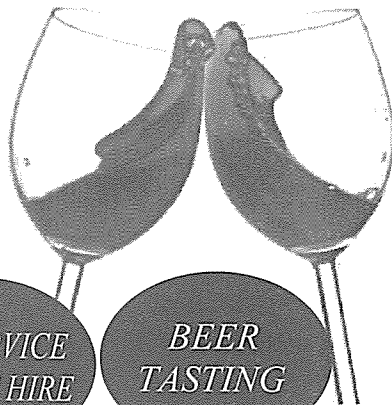
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Buzzards are back

Buzzards have become a relatively common sight on the Cave Hill and its immediate neighbourhood. They are easy to recognise as they circle high in the sky, typically as a pair above the side of the hill, but occasionally in family groups of three or four. Often, you will hear their distinctive mewing call before you look up and see them. They are large birds, about two feet long with a wingspan of up to five feet and mostly brown or dark grey in colour. The comparable figures for golden eagles are three feet long and seven feet for wingspan, so in areas where both birds are present buzzards are often confused with eagles – in the Scottish Highlands buzzards are jokingly referred to as “tourist eagles”.

The good news about buzzards is that they are a conservation success story. At a time when many common bird species, such as sparrows and starlings, are in decline, buzzard numbers are showing a healthy increase. They were once common throughout Britain and Ireland, but widespread killing in the 18th and 19th centuries resulted in their complete disappearance from Ireland and also from most of England, Scotland and Wales. Most of the killing was by gamekeepers, but this persecution declined greatly after the First World War. However, just as buzzard numbers were recovering, two other threats emerged. One was the rabbit disease myxomatosis, deliberately introduced in the 1950s and which almost wiped out their main food supply. The other threat was the introduction of pesticides, in particular DDT, which affected their reproduction. But in the 1970s rabbits began to develop resistance to myxomatosis and DDT was banned. As a result, buzzard numbers began to recover. They had reappeared in Ireland in the 1950s and have gradually spread to the point where they can now be seen in many areas, especially the north and east. But their numbers are still small and as carrion eaters, they are vulnerable to poisoned bait left out by farmers to kill foxes and crows.

However, the fact that buzzards have come back from the brink of extinction and repopulated much of their former territories is greatly encouraging. In recent years, there have been organised reintroductions of golden eagles in Donegal, sea-eagles in Kerry and red kites in Down. Although some of these birds have been killed, there is optimism that they will successfully re-establish as breeding populations after an absence of hundreds of years.

Peter McCloskey



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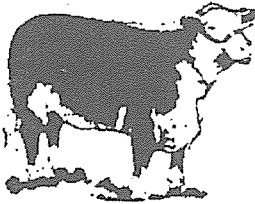
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A walk on Cavehill in April

Organised by Cavehill Conservation Campaign

When the hardy band of walkers met at the Castle, there was an unseasonably cold wind blowing so out came the heavy fleeces and coats - and for me gloves as well! However, while waiting for a straggler it was possible to enjoy the brilliant colours of the spring bedding plants and bulbs in the Castle's famous Cat Garden, and to drink in the perfume from the hyacinths. Our mentor for this exploratory walk was Cormac Hamill, who briefly outlined the circumstances surrounding the building of Belfast Castle, its recent history under the stewardship of the Shaftesburys and, latterly, its acquisition and renovation by Belfast City Council.

Suitably informed about the estate, our group then made its way up through the trees.

As we brushed the undergrowth we were rewarded by the scent of garlic with its fresh, fleshy brilliant green leaves reaching up to the sky before the branches of deciduous trees and blocked out the light. The bluebells were struggling to assert themselves but delayed by the hard winter there were as yet no flowers. Hopefully, by the time of the next walk, in May, there will be carpets of them with their heady perfume.

At the *Volunteers' Well*, which is not in fact a well, but rather a spring marking the boundary between the upper layers of basalt rock and chalk, the stream flowed fast and clear. It has been dammed to form a shallow pool and, one may imagine how, in the past, weary travellers paused to drink, as this is the last watering hole on the way to the summit. We were then joined by a chocolate Labrador dog who demonstrated exactly his pleasure in the dams, leaping into the pool to cool off and splash around!

Keeping to the path now we walked upwards and onwards to emerge from the trees within sight of the Caves (five in all, whose origins are uncertain) and the so-called Camel's Humps. The younger and fitter members climbed into the lower cave before we all continued round the rim of a well known declivity fancifully described as the *Devil's Punch Bowl*. There, with the smell of burnt undergrowth, we were made only too well aware of the ugly scars left by the recent grass fires. Upwards again and I have to admit this bit slowed me down, stopping to admire the views more often than was strictly warranted by the leisurely nature of the

ascend. Those contemplating participation on one of these guided walks need not fear a particularly energetic climb.

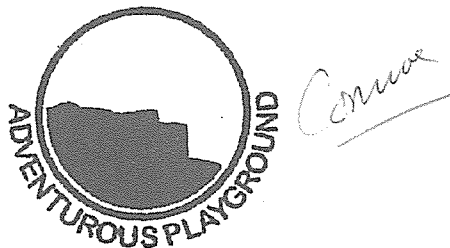
On the summit, the skylark could be heard but not seen as it chirruped its distinctive song into the wind. The grass was wind-swept here, with new growth just showing through in places. The splendid views invited photos to be taken at McArts Fort, originally a roughly circular defensive structure with steep drops on three sides. The newly installed information stands were examined and read - and their obtrusive positioning duly criticised. As it was a clear day we could identify Scrabo Tower, Stormont Buildings, and further afield, Carlingford Lough, the Copeland Islands and - very faintly - Scotland. And, on this occasion, not a vapour trail in the sky to mar the view.

From then on it was all downhill; gently meandering over the heathland, stopping to see where, some years ago, there had been a small archaeological dig. A gold pre-Celtic dress fastening was discovered here and the fastening is now on display in the Ulster Museum.

Leaving the main Hightown Road the downward path now skirts the Wallace Quarry, once a busy site as the soft rock was used for ballast in ships as well as its more obvious use in the construction industry. It was transported to Belfast by a gravity railway via the Limestone Road. Now the Quarry is reverting back to nature with lush growth covering much of the lower rock faces alive with birdsong as we passed by. An anachronistic smiling graffiti face on a sheer rock outcrop, was admired more for the rock climbing skill of the artist rather than any facility with a brush.

Descending through the trees again, the path opened out and in a small patch of boggy land, flag irises were emerging beside the ruins of an old gamekeeper's cottage but were not yet in flower. Back along the grassy path bordered by shrubs and trees, past another spring with its stream in full spate, more garlic was in evidence. Soon we were back at the Castle, glowing from our efforts, a touch of wind burn on our cheeks, and a gratifying sense of greater familiarity with such a much loved part of our heritage. It is intended that guided walks, such as that described above, will take place on a regular basis. Those who seek further information on the programme of walks, or who wish to participate in a walk, should consult our website at www.cavehillconservation.org.

Sheila Johnston



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Planning policy and beauty spots

This organisation has repeatedly warned readers of the *Campaigner* of the dangers of unsympathetic planning decisions allowing developments which become a blight on the countryside in general – and as far as we are concerned, a danger to Cave Hill.

We now learn from newspaper reports that more than three-quarters of planning applications for Northern Ireland's most scenic areas over the last ten years were accepted.

Of 1,994 applications made for projects in Areas of High Scenic Value from 2000 to 2009, 1,495 were approved and 231 were refused. 195 were withdrawn and, in 2009, 66 remain 'live'.

This information was elicited in response to a written Assembly question put by the SDLP's Thomas Burns, who indicated that there was little point in having a policy on areas of high scenic value if so many applications were accepted.

Burns, in statements reported in the *Belfast Telegraph*, argues that only exceptional cases should be approved. He went on to warn that, for example, the poultry litter biomass plant proposed by Rose Energy should not be sited close to the shore of Lough Erne, insisting that, "there's not much point in having a policy of high scenic value if you are

going to allow over three quarters of those planning applications to be approved – that is not protecting areas of natural beauty".

This should be remembered the next time there is a proposal for the development of 'amenities' such as a cable car from say, Belfast Zoo to the summit of Cave Hill.

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Townlands

Many of those participating in the Cavehill Conservation Campaign's recent fund raising Pub Quiz in Fortwilliam Golf Club were bemused – or, indeed, amused – by a question that required knowledge of the place-names, *Daddystown* and *Mammystown* for areas in the vicinity of Cave Hill. But place-names do give a sense of history and identity to localities otherwise offered only the banality of numbered postal codes.

Kay Muhr of the Ulster Place-Name Society has made the point that many people do not realise that townlands were restored to Northern Ireland addresses in 2005, and that these are also printed on back of the new *Discovery* series of maps. Writing in the Belfast Telegraph, she makes it clear that the Ulster Place-Name Society supports the decision of the Stormont Executive to promote townlands. Any indication of decision making at Stormont is to be welcomed, but this one is certainly worth rising a glass in celebration.

Muhr also points out that a website showing the history and the maps of townlands is now available and may be found at www.placenamesni.org. This is a consequence of the partnership between Land and Property Services (formerly the Ordnance Survey NI) and the Northern Ireland Place-Name Project based at Queen's.

Not all the place-name information, she says, is displaying perfectly yet, but this is to be remedied in the near future.

So far the site provides the meaning of all the townland names of Co Down and the researchers are in pursuit of funding to complete the record for the other five counties of Northern Ireland.

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Circle or highlight these words in the square

BASALT	DONEGALLS	MONDAY
BENEDEN	EASTER	OAKS
BENMADIGAN	FAIR	PINE
CAVES	HAZELWOOD	SCOTCH
DEERPARK	LIMESTONE	ZOO
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