

The Cave Hill CAMPAIGNER

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A VIEW FROM MACART'S FORT

There is that delicious moment every year when one hears the first skylark. This year it was extraordinarily early and wafted our way by southerly winds on 8th March. Lying on the top of Cave Hill at MacArt's Fort, one can easily ask what is the environmental problem if these travellers from afar still come? Looking about and reflecting on the changes of thirty years they are small enough. The new roadway to the summit from the Hightown Road which was supposed to green over but hasn't, the barbed wire fences that went up at the same time for no useful purpose, the continued proliferation of electronic masts of one kind or another on the surrounding hill tops, but none of it enough yet to put off the skylarks.

What then is there to worry about if we, and the skylarks, can still enjoy this unique resource on the very edge of a city? Reflect a moment: it is only as a result of constant vigilance and action that we can preserve resources such as this. A combination of greed, the knee-jerk support of politicians for commercial development, short term thinking, indifference to the great outdoors and the environment, the pressures of housing demand - all of these have done and still can do untold damage.

As we remember elsewhere in this issue, we owe present-day public access to the Cave Hill to the pioneer campaign of the Rights of Way Association, which defeated the speculative developers of the 1850's. Grandiose and inappropriate plans for the Cave Hill have followed over the years, ranging from the pre-First World War scheme for a tramway to the summit, to the proposal for a cableway of only a couple of years ago. Some of these schemes have fallen by the wayside because the economics didn't add up. Others, such as the mining proposal which gave birth to this organisation, have only been stopped by vigorous public opposition. We can guarantee that yet more such notions will surface in the future. The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign will defend the hill as before.

Prospective threats to the Cave Hill are only a microcosm of those that endanger the Belfast Hills generally, all the way from the Black Mountain via the Cave Hill to Carnmoney Hill. The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign, along with others from the foot of the Black Mountain, first urged a collective approach to these problems in the early 1990's.

It is hugely encouraging that years of co-operative work have now borne fruit in the formation of a powerful Belfast Hills Partnership supported by government and the five district councils which have parts of the hills in their areas. The Partnership, which is currently recruiting staff and will be initially based in the offices of the Collin Glen Trust, has an impressive programme to improve conditions in the hills, and including for those who live there. Perhaps above all its work will encourage a greater public commitment to the protection of what remains a uniquely valuable if fragile resource for us all. Its work should make it more difficult for those whose only motivation is financial gain; it should make it easier for those who are merely unthinking to think again.

John Gray

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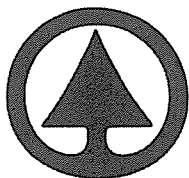
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Campaigning Events

Cleanup day

was Saturday 24 April.

Annual General Meeting

is on Thursday 20 May at Fortwilliam Golf Club at 7.30 pm. The meeting will include a talk on the new Belfast Hills Partnership and what it hopes to achieve and will be followed by musical entertainment. Please note that the club operates a strict "no jeans" rule.

Annual user survey

of Cave Hill is on Sunday 6 June from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm. This is an important project at which we monitor the number of people using the hill at various points. If you would be prepared to help by volunteering for a two hour shift, please get in touch.

Contact us by email at cavehill@freeuk.com

And don't forget our website: www.cavehill.freeuk.com

Editor

News from Belfast Castle Estate

DRINKING PROBLEM

The last year has witnessed the development of a social and environmental problem in the grounds of Belfast Castle. All summer long, on a daily basis and throughout the year at weekends, crowds of noisy drinkers and drug users have invaded the Castle park. As well as causing distress to local residents, fires were lit destroying trees, and litter was thrown everywhere. This is proving to be a serious ongoing problem and meetings attempting to find a solution are currently being held between the PSNI, the City Council and local politicians. It has been improved recently by the deployment of a security company at weekends, but this effort will have to be sustained in the months ahead.

LITTER-LOUTS

Unfortunately, clean-up day might have to be changed to clean-up week! There is little doubt that the amount of rubbish discarded in the Castle grounds has increased significantly. Piles of beer cans, bottles, and blue plastic bags are a common sight and they currently challenge the daffodils for the attention of the walker and nature lover. Despite the City Council making great efforts to clean up and provide waste bins at appropriate areas, certain members of the public insist on selfishly discarding their litter indiscriminately, and of course the night-time drinkers couldn't care less.

THE MILLENNIUM HERB GARDEN

The herb garden is now into its third year and is maturing well. Mid-summer is the time when the plants reach full bloom. We are hoping to erect a podium, in the near future, the purpose being to provide information for the general public on the variety of herbs grown here, and on their potential culinary and medicinal uses. Visitors are encouraged to take samples of any of the herbs.

Geraldine Birch

Waterworks Down The Drain?

Fill in the lower pond at the Waterworks and build a leisure centre there. Writing this on 1st April it reads like a classic April Fools Day joke. If only it was. Instead, it is an immediate threat, and a classic example of how little our politicians actually care about the environment, or, at least, of how easily they will sacrifice it when it seems politically expedient.

The Water Works is an historic feature built in the 1840's to provide Belfast's water supply. Right up until the late 1960's it was actively used for a whole range of outdoor activities organised by the Council including boating, fishing and swimming. Council promotional literature described it as 'Belfast's inland seaside resort'. Thirty years of gross neglect have not destroyed its inherent and unique attractiveness. It remains important as an inner city nature reserve, and is part of a green wedge running into the City. It is heavily used by walkers of all ages. The children's playgrounds are popular, as is the new multi-sports facility. All these uses, with the exception of the multi-sports facility, are on a free access basis, unlike the pay-in environment of a leisure centre.

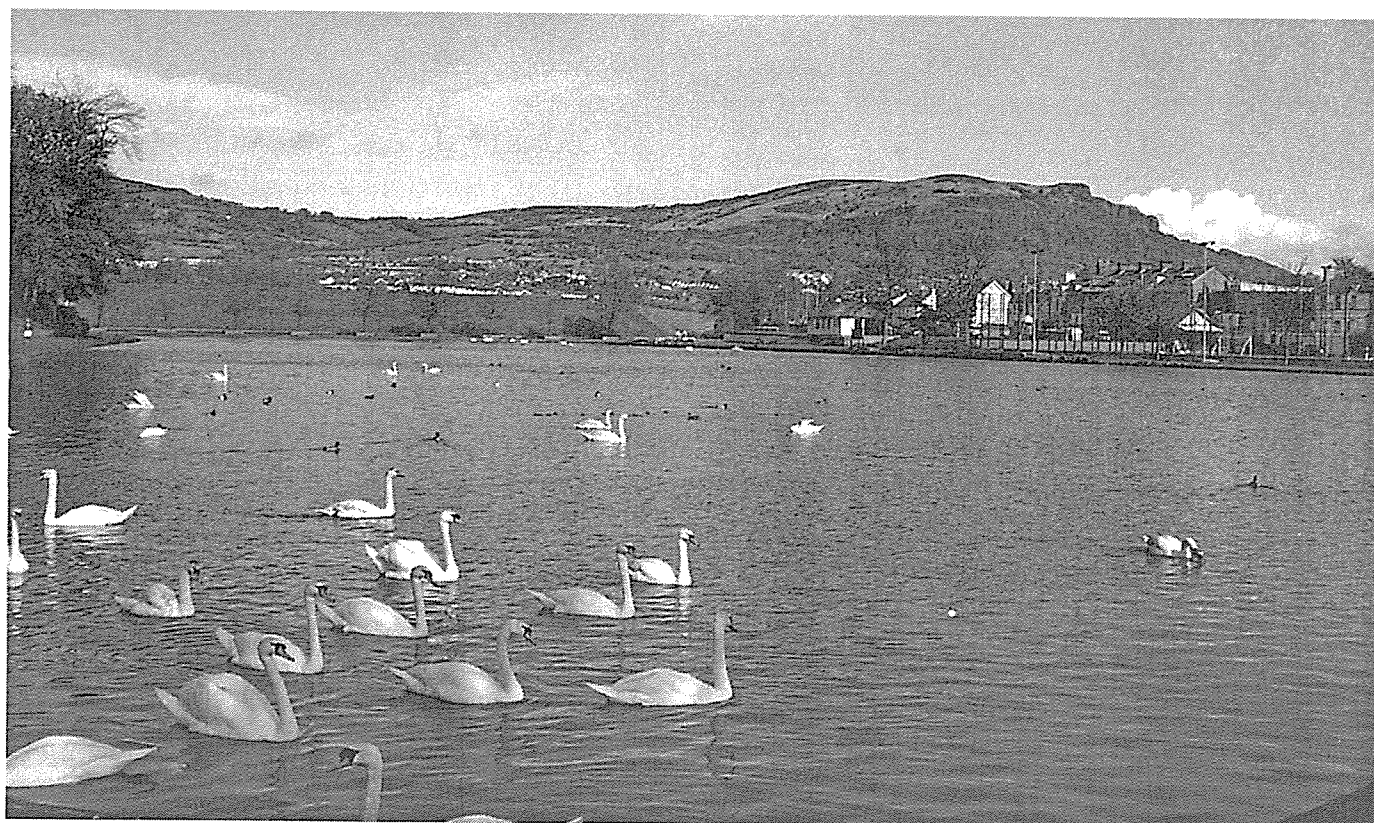
How could such a proposal emerge? What is not in question is that mainly Nationalist areas in North Belfast have long felt deprived of proper leisure facilities. Travel to other centres in mainly loyalist areas is a problem for young people in particular. The new balance on the City Council has enhanced Nationalist bargaining power. Trade-offs with Unionists are now possible – one leisure centre for you, one for us. East Belfast gets one, North Belfast gets one.

Now the race is on between the SDLP and Sinn Fein to prove that they were instrumental in getting North Belfast's entitlement, and to get it built as fast as possible before the window of opportunity closes. In this political steeplechase, no one questions the logic of separate leisure centres for separate communities. The pattern, by which Belfast has 17 leisure centres while a similar sized city like Sheffield has 3 really good ones, will continue. As for the new North Belfast leisure centre, no one stops to think too hard about siting it. Simply getting it is the be all and end all of it. Then, take a brief look, and isn't the Waterworks the largest vacant plot in an otherwise densely packed area?

Certainly over the years the City Council have done their best through wilful neglect to ensure that the Waterworks can be perceived as a vacant plot. Look at the mud bank at the top of the lower pond. After prolonged wrangling over cost and procedures, it appears that the Council has now decided to dredge the lower pond, but only because of the immediate health and safety risk, not because of any amenity considerations. See how they have removed all the flowering shrubs in the lower part of the park ostensibly to remove cover for drinkers, drug-dealers, and glue sniffers.

So the ground seemed well prepared for a consultation exercise with a pre-ordained outcome. A Council questionnaire was hardly distributed at all, and in any case asked general questions about leisure centre provision in Belfast, rather than adequately exploring the Waterworks

continued over



issue, let alone enabling informed responses to it. The Council's website actually shows three possible locations in the Waterworks (see link at the end of this article) and gives no information about the size of the proposed facility or about what it will contain. We may presume that the favoured option does embrace the lower pond, because Sinn Fein have consulted 'environmentalists' about the effect on bird life there. Apparently the birds don't mind being moved. One would have loved to be in on this consultation exercise with the large population of mute swans: perhaps the geese, pochard, and tufted ducks were more talkative!

If they were hoping for an easy ride on all this, they were in for a rude shock. Consultation meetings held in Manor Street and Newington were well attended and the majority expressed resolute opposition to any proposal to damage the Waterworks. Here were those living in the area apparently looking a gift horse in the mouth. What they were saying is that they do not want a leisure centre at any price, and especially if that price is to be the partial destruction of the unique community asset of the Waterworks.

Perhaps the immediate hostile reaction to the proposal will lead to second thoughts. We hope so. Already we hear one response along the lines that it is up to opponents of the scheme to come up with an alternative location for the proposed leisure centre. No! The Waterworks should never have been proposed as a leisure centre site, and it is the task of political leaders to come up a solution other than one suitable only for April Fools Day.

You can see the map showing the proposed locations for the new leisure centre at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/leisurereview/Proposed_LC_Sites.asp

John Gray

Tree planting, March 2004



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RESURRECTION OF THE CHAPEL?

In a recent exchange of letters on the subject of listed buildings in *The Times* a correspondent argued convincingly that the protection of such buildings is a recognized public good, and that is why ownership rights are circumscribed in the interests of the community. To that extent, listed buildings are protected in much the same way as archaeological sites and wildlife habitats. That is, of course, the theory; in practice, public bodies in Northern Ireland have often failed to take action to prevent the unauthorised demolition of many listed buildings, and in other cases, the destruction of many fine buildings has been facilitated by de-listing them. A building of historical importance and – now, much diminished architectural distinction – which is threatened with oblivion is the Chapel of the Resurrection just below Belfast Castle.

Originally Belfast Castle Chapel it was designed by Lanyon, Lynn and Lanyon, in what Paul Larmour describes as the Decorated Gothic style, and completed in 1869 as a mortuary chapel for the Earl of Belfast who had died in 1853. The mortal remains of the Earl and those of four of his immediate relatives, including his mother who died in Paris in 1860, were transferred to the Chapel from the Chichester family vaults in Carrickfergus and re-interred in a crypt cut into the rock under the chapel. In 1934 the Earl of Shaftesbury presented his estate on the slopes of Cavehill, and the Castle to the City. Four years later the Chapel of the Resurrection was transferred without endowment to the Church of Ireland and, in conjunction with St Peter's Church on the Antrim Road, services continued to be held in the Chapel throughout the Second World War. Thereafter it was used rarely and in 1972 it was deconsecrated and closed. Furnishings were distributed to other churches, most notably St Peter's, and a white marble monument of the young Earl being mourned by his mother is now to be found in the City Hall. The Chapel was listed in 1974 and sold by the Church of Ireland in 1988. As with so many vacant buildings, it was repeatedly vandalised and is now in a sorry state of disrepair. Its present owner is P J Conway (Contractors) Ltd and the land on which it is situated is being developed for private residences. Recently, however, the BBC has shown some interest in including the Chapel of the Resurrection in a new series of television programmes on the restoration of listed buildings under threat.

"Once lost, listed buildings cannot be replaced...They represent a finite resource and irreplaceable asset and contribute to the quality of the built environment". Who could argue with such sentiments? One is heartened even more by the fact that it appears in the preamble to Planning Policy Statement 6, published by the Planning Service. This document goes on to point out that the destruction of a historic building is very seldom necessary, and pleads for such buildings to be incorporated into new developments or for new uses to be found for them (Policy BH 10). Consent to demolish a listed

building, it avers, will not be given simply because redevelopment is economically more attractive to the developer than repair; and demolition of a Grade A or Grade B+ building (the Chapel of the Resurrection is in the latter category) should be wholly exceptional and undertaken only after permission has been granted and the building appropriately recorded.

It is not unfair to say that in Northern Ireland neither private owners nor public bodies have a reputation for seeing themselves as custodians of the country's architectural heritage. All too often demolition or calculated decay are regarded as the easy options. In the recent elections, Planning issues and environmental considerations did not feature prominently in the manifestoes of the main political parties. Concerted and sustained pressure by organizations such as the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society and the Environment and Heritage Service, supported by residents' associations, can however make a difference. The Planning Service has provision for compulsory acquisition as a last resort. If an owner cannot maintain or restore an important building such as the Chapel of the Resurrection, or if he is not interested in doing so, sale or leasing to a restoring purchaser may be a possibility, and one that is allowed for in the rubric of the Planning Service. Those who see the Chapel of the Resurrection as an important building in its own right, as well as an architecturally significant part of an ensemble of buildings comprising Belfast Castle itself, and the former Castle Gate Lodge at Strathmore Park, like to think that it may yet be saved.

Edward McCamley

Belfast's Original Black Man: The Young Earl 1827-1853 by Brendan Colgan was an important source in the preparation of this article.



Samuel Ferguson and the Throne

Coming home from the Abbey Centre, I stopped the car at the remains of the Throne Hospital to admire its imaginative design amidst modern buildings on the Whitewell Road. New houses and a shopping development have been built behind it. Below it is Hazelwood Integrated Primary School and above, the brooding basalt presence of the Cave Hill.

This was the home of Samuel Ferguson and in Cathal O'Byrne's *As I Roved Out*, there are a number of interesting essays from The Cave Hill. In *Some Stories of Old Cave Hill* we are told that the inaugural throne of the O'Neills once stood on top of Cave Hill and that their association with the place had an enormous influence on the district. Ferguson's home was renamed *The Throne*, a name which it has to this day.

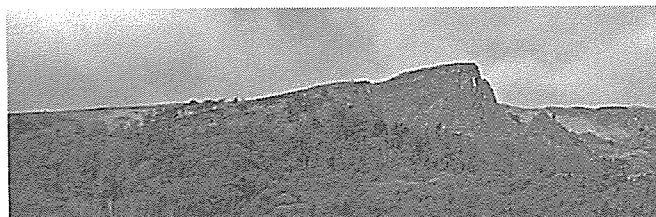
Whether or not the actual throne existed there doesn't concern me. I am more interested in the way the tradition may have influenced Ferguson and perhaps contributed to his interest in Irish Literature.

Ferguson was born in 1810 in High Street Belfast. It was a time when the ideas of the United Irish Society still lingered and Ferguson became aware of the idealism and which had appeared in the latter part of the eighteenth century and which was preserved by Drennan and others in his own time. However, Ferguson's early essays have an arrogance and intellectual superiority about them, especially when he deals with his Catholic fellow-countrymen and the Catholic Church itself. Published in 1833, *A dialogue between the head and Heart of an Irish Protestant* in which he extols the cultural superiority of Irish Protestants over the Roman Catholic's mixture of error and superstition. The arrogant tone of this essay is understandable when one considers his education and background. The title is particularly telling and, as time marched on, his heart became the predominant force as he came to realise that it was essential to understand the nature of his fellow-countrymen and what better way to do it than to learn the Irish language and read as much Irish Literature as possible. On one thing, however, his head and heart were united, and that was in their love of Ireland, and his belief that his blood was as Irish as anyone's.

With his two friends George Fox and Thomas O'Hagan, Ferguson studied Irish and in a short time was fluent enough to carry out a print investigation into Irish Literature. As he probed deeper into the character of the poetry and the people, he came to regard the natives as his equals. One of his most important achievements was that he established a way of translating which retained the simple, ruggedness of the Irish original instead of turning out parlour-room poems. His translations are as important as Bunting's Musical Collections and set the path for Douglas Hyde and others to follow.

One final point. The remains of the Throne is situated above Belfast's second integrated school which was established almost one hundred and sixty years after his birth. It seems that little has changed in that time in terms of the gulf between the two traditions. Perhaps more progress would have been made if we had spent more time perusing those things in our cultures which can sustain and nurture the spirit.

Tom Morgan



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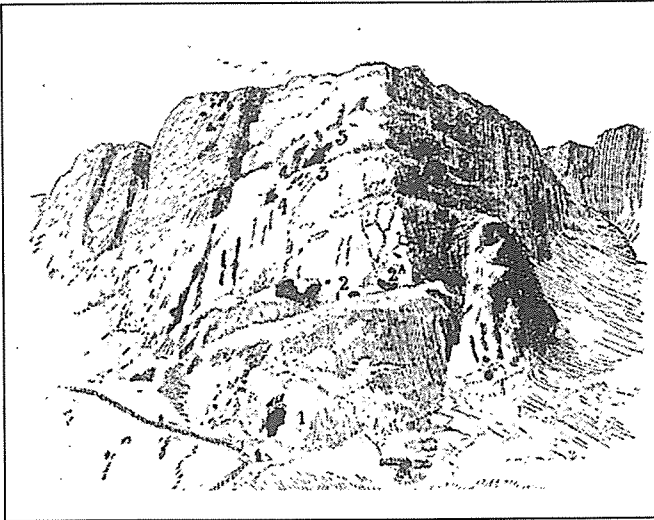
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The Caves on Cave Hill – a physical description



The best physical description occurs in a detailed survey published by Philip Reynolds and Samuel Turner in the Ulster Journal of Archaeology vol 8 no 2 (1902) and I have taken the liberty of reproducing a drawing by Joseph Carey, which the authors of the article used.

There are five caves in total in a nearly sheer basalt face about 93 metres high. Only one is reasonably accessible and another one can be reached with care. The other three cannot be safely reached without climbing skills and the appropriate equipment. Basalt, it should be noted is a notoriously bad rock for climbing; it is greasy, crumbly and with rounded holds and the climb should not be attempted.

The first cave is situated just above the main path to the top of Cave Hill. It is nowadays about four metres above the path and can be climbed into with a modicum of care. The soil below it has eroded away badly in the last hundred years; there is a line on the rock just below the lip of the cave which seems to show where rock has recently been exposed. This is borne out by a photo in the Welch collection which shows a lady with crinolines and parasol perched in the entrance. There is also a sketch (undated but nineteenth or possibly eighteenth century) in the F J Bigger collection in the City Library which also shows the soil level up to the mouth of the cave. It is the second-largest cave, measuring about six metres from entrance to rear, six and a half metres across and two metres or so in height. This second cave cannot be seen from below.

The second cave can be reached by scrambling up the soil to the left of the first cave and then climbing up a five metre sheer cliff. This leads to a secure ledge system and this in turn leads to both the second cave and a shallow hollow in the face called 2A in Carey's diagram. This second hollow was known as the lion's den according to the old sketch map. They are about twenty three metres above cave 1. This second cave is the smallest of the five being about three metres deep, nearly three metres wide and less than two metres high.

The other three caves form a connected system. Folk memory indicates access to them via a dangerous horizontal path across the cliff to cave 3 and the UJA article also refers to access this way. That path is now eroded away and such access is now impossible. The sketch in the Bigger collection shows a winding path from ledge to ledge going up from slightly to the right of cave 2. That access is also now not possible. It is possible to reach the fourth cave by climbing vertically up from the ledges above and to the left of cave 2 but it is a serious rock-climbing exercise; six metres of treacherous basalt.

Although its entrance is small, cave 4 is the largest cave,

being about nine metres deep, five metres wide and over two metres high at its highest. Near the back, on the right is an earth ramp leading to a hole in the ceiling and through which you emerge onto the floor of cave 3. This cave is about six metres deep, three and a half metres wide and less than two metres high. The mouth of the fifth cave is on the top right corner of cave 3 as viewed from below the caves. Access involves a slight exposed scramble at the mouth of cave 3 and this opens into a cave four and a half metres deep, five metres wide and two and a half metres high.

On my last visit, a number of years ago, there was little evidence of human visitation other than two religious inscriptions. The difficulty of access ensures their preservation.

Little is known for definite about them and their history and what has been written is largely speculation. In a future article, I intend to bring together what is known and gather together any references to them.

Cormac Hamill

WALKING ON CAVE HILL

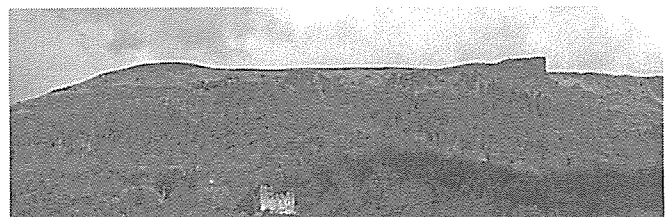
It's surprising how many people who live in the area of Cave Hill have never really walked on it. Most will have visited Belfast Castle at some time and maybe walked in its grounds, but a much smaller number will have climbed the hill to the top, or even got as far as the caves.

There are many possible walks, ranging from easy strolls to strenuous climbs. Most of the paths in the immediate vicinity of the castle offer easy woodland walking. One path from Belfast Castle goes up through the woods and emerges just below the caves. From there you scramble up to MacArt's Fort, but it is a steep and strenuous climb which requires good fitness and appropriate footwear. An easier but longer option is to turn right at the caves and head northwards along the narrow track known as the sheep's pad. This takes you along the base of the escarpment and eventually to the top, turning left immediately after the old wooden posts and walking up a reasonably gentle slope above the caves and towards MacArt's Fort.

The longest and most complete walk is "the circuit". You can start at the Upper Cavehill Road entrance where the road ends and there is a turnstile giving access to the Green Lane. Follow the Green Lane to the waterfall known as Benn's Cascade which is at the top of Carr's Glen where the land from the Hightown Road meets the Green Lane. Turning right at the waterfall you continue along a stoned path and an ascent which is steep in places as it takes you to the top of Cave Hill. Continue northwards towards MacArt's Fort and then along the top of the escarpment above the caves and eventually turn right at the old wooden posts to follow the sheep's pad down to the caves and from there down to Belfast Castle and Upper Cavehill Road. This walk will take between one and a half to two hours, depending on your pace. Again, appropriate footwear is necessary and you should not underestimate the wind chill factor on the plateau which is noticeable in most weather conditions throughout the year.

More information on walks can be found on our website: www.cavehill.freeuk.com

Editor



The Great Cave Hill Right of Way Case

Those of us who today encourage access to the Cave Hill and more generally the Belfast Hills follow in a distinguished tradition. The Association for the Protection of Public Rights of Way in and around Belfast, a pioneer in the field, was formed in 1856 specifically to defend the public right of access to the Cave Hill. It went on to win a famous court case in 1859, which secured the historic right of way up the hill above Gray's Lane and via the Volunteer Well.

In 1855 one Joseph Magill blocked off the route and began construction of his imposing villa, Martlett Towers close to the old path. To add insult to injury the historic Volunteer Well was to be enclosed within the outbuildings of the new edifice.

Magill had obtained the land by inheritance from his father-in-law, Andrew Nash. Nash was a colourful character, a navy lieutenant from Cork who fell in love with and married Sarah Orr 'The Flower of Cave Hill', and owner of the lands later at issue. Nash was a bon-viveur who lived beyond his means until, as Francis Joseph Biggar tells us, his creditors were in such hot pursuit that there was 'often only one safe day in the week (Sunday) for him to walk abroad'.

Joseph Magill was a would-be businessman and speculative developer and must have seemed a godsend to Nash in his straitened financial position. When Martlett Towers was completed and the path closed off there was little sign of the storm to come. The customary Easter Monday Fair below the caves could not take place, but there was no immediate protest and Magill could in any case pose on the side of morality because by 1856 the fair was in decline and disapproved of by the clergy of all denominations as an occasion of drunken debauchery. What Magill and his father-in-law failed to anticipate were the strong feelings of the most respectable citizens in the area, including their own neighbours. The Rights of Way Association rapidly recruited 68 members including both of Belfast's MPs.

Magill refused to negotiate on the matter and eventually, in 1858, the Rights of Way Association took him to court and successfully prosecuted him for obstructing a public highway. Magill appealed the verdict in August 1859. The appeal case ran for five days and was a public sensation. Not only were the proceedings fully covered in the local papers, but at the conclusion the Northern Whig also rushed out a full 88-page

transcript. This remains an invaluable source not only for the affair itself, but also for the whole social history of the Cave Hill from the late 18th century onwards. The oldest prosecution witness was 89-year-old James Grimshaw, Vice-President of the Rights of Way Association, and senior member of the Grimshaw dynasty of cotton manufacturers from Greencastle. He could remember the Volunteers enjoying free access to the Volunteer Well in the previous century. [The Volunteers were a Protestant militia formed in 1778 to counter the threat of a French invasion of Ireland during the American War of Independence. They quickly espoused radical politics and helped to obtain greater independence for the Irish Parliament and further relaxation of the Penal Laws against Catholics.] Other evidence was given about use of the path as a traditional route from Geencastle over the Cave Hill to Glenavy, and as a route of access to numerous small limestone quarry workings on the face of the hill.

Most telling of all was evidence about the Easter Monday Fair. Andrew Nash claimed that he constantly warned people off the hill, but admitted that he had encouraged "more respectable" visitors. But his own tenant, Patrick McHale, who had lived in a small cottage immediately behind the Volunteer Well described far more general access. He and his wife Bidy had sold food and poteen to passers by, and on Easter Monday itself Bidy had done a roaring poteen trade with the revellers at the bottom cave. Nash's attempt to describe limited access by landlord invitation for the select few was discredited. Worse still, his own architect, Robert Young, also gave evidence against him. He stated that he had understood that there would be 'a path left along the wall at Mr Nash's mearing for the public'. Since childhood Young, who was a keen amateur geologist, had rambled the Cave Hill and he was doubly offended by Magill's bad faith.

Magill lost the case, and was effectively ruined by it. In the 1880s, when the much richer and more powerful Donegalls wished to alter the route of the traditional path, they had to proceed with great care, and by act of parliament. Nothing remains of Martlett Towers except for the gate lodge facing the top of Gray's Lane – a cautionary tale for speculative developers!

John Gray



Artistic Walking Tour

Several years ago I went on a walking tour of The Latin Quarter of Paris. The guide was a Dubliner eager to please and establish an extension of his business "The literary pubs of Dublin". The walk was fascinating including Joyce's earlier friend and publisher, and Hemingway's studio apartment. When it was over, we drank and chatted in one of the atmospheric cafes near the university.

Home in North Belfast weeks later I picked up an old copy of *Threshold*, the Lyric Theatre's literary magazine. In it was a short article by novelist Brian Moore describing his early life in Clifton Street watching the Orange parades leaving for the field. It was simple and evocative. Moore's father was a surgeon in the Mater Hospital and he attended St Malachy's College close by. His house stood there with blocked-up windows until it was demolished, the final accolade to one of Belfast's great writers.

When I delved deeper, a host of artistic excellence was unearthed. Louis MacNeice was born in Brookvale Avenue which is now the bursar's house for the Belfast Royal Academy. Not far away in Cliftonville Avenue was John Hewitt. He has written some fine lyrics about his nurse or maid, simple, well-formed and amusing. Roy McFadden lived in Kingsmere Avenue during the war years and he has told how the blast from one of the German bombs brought the ceiling down leaving dust and lime in egg cups on the table.

One of our greatest painters lived in a prefab on the Westland Road. Private, aloof but friendly, John Luke eked out a living from his art at a time when painting and writing was only understood by a few. The purchase of antique furniture was more in vogue! In Salisbury Avenue William Connors, that recorder of Belfast life in its various guises, died from hypothermia in 1968. His friend Lynn Doyle said, "his hands captured a generation of workers and the glory of Belfast has been exalted."

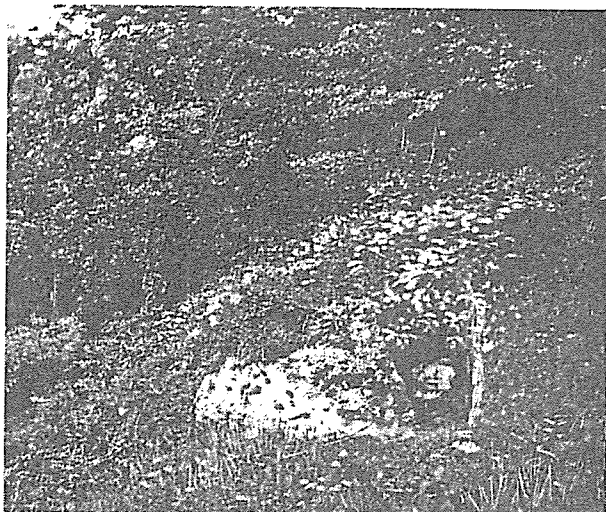
In Cedar Avenue was the lovely Helen Waddell. Toasted in London for her brilliance and imagination, her star is secure in the history of literature. Carl Hardebeck, musician, collector and composer lived on the Limestone Road. The late Sean O'Riada acclaimed him as one of the seminal influences on the musical muse in Ireland.

Today we have Ciaran Carson, Medbh McGuckian and Frank Ormsby under Napoleon's Nose. There are probably more but what started as a walk in Paris, turned into a walk in North Belfast which has enriched many lives. Or to quote MacNeice in his "Valediction",

"But I cannot deny my past to which myself is wed,
The woven figure cannot undo its thread."

Bernie Finnan-Morgan

McCracken's stone – where is it?



a man is depicted but close inspection reveals that the man has been painted in; the figure may be a representation of E.J. Bigger himself.

It is known that after the battle of Antrim, Henry Joy McCracken hid out on the Cave Hill and in some way this stone may have become linked with that episode in the public imagination.

Has that memory survived? Does anyone remember such a tradition and does anyone now know where that stone is? I would love to know and would be very grateful if someone were to contact me with the information. (cormachamill@ireland.com or 90291357).

Cormac Hamill

Beneath Napoleon's Nose

If he asleep would ever speak
Oh, what a tale he'd tell
That go-between who's looked serene
To heaven and through hell
From crannog, cairn, cave and rath
His story weaves and flows
To those who'd seek the pensive path
Beneath Napoleon's Nose

In souterrains 'neath leafy lanes
With haughty solitude
Myths caught fire with Wolf and Squire
And spread to Hazelwood
Druidic chants and warlike rants
The cries of "friends" or "foes"?
Echo 'round the land and town
Beneath Napoleon's Nose

On MacArt's throne, the dapper Tone
Espoused the fleur-de-lys
Through Colin Glen militia men
Pursued the raparee
Dour highwayman's social plan
Glib dreamer's Gallic rose
Still impel the folk who dwell
Beneath Napoleon's Nose

Madigan reigned from his domain
On the fort of the High Mound
The Sperrin Hills, the Antrim Hills
And those of County Down
Once treasured lands at his command
From dawn 'til daylight's close
The chieftain's gold since bought and sold
Beneath Napoleon's Nose

Samson's set in silhouette
In passive reverence
Goliath kneels a leg of steel
In grudging deference
In polite capitulation
They salute MacArt's repose
To please each congregation
Beneath Napoleon's Nose

My travelling days, my roving ways
Are all but grains of sand
For in that town the truth I found
When first she held my hand
She showed me then the last Amen
I offered her a rose
My heart, her soul, a kiss we stole
Beneath Napoleon's Nose

If he asleep would ever speak
Oh, what a tale he'd tell
That go-between who's looked serene
To heaven and through hell
If we should tread the pensive path
And follow where it goes
May it guide us all to peace
Beneath Napoleon's Nose

Eugene Dunphy (March 2002)

Big Houses of the Antrim Road

If you walk along the Antrim Road, Somerton Road or Fortwilliam Park you will still see many examples of grand old residences dating back to the late 1800's. Although much has been lost to the developers, enough survives to remind you of former glories.

This area of North Belfast was a desirable place to live, with its views of Belfast Lough competing with the majestic backdrop of the Cave Hill. No wonder many wealthy bankers, merchants and shipping magnates set up home in the area. One of the most exclusive addresses was Fortwilliam Park which runs from the Antrim Road down to the Shore Road. Majestic pillars and gates designed by William Barre and constructed by William Valentine stood at either end of the park. The Antrim Road gates were Gothic in style while the Shore Road ones were more classical. In the street directory of 1877, Fortwilliam Park had the following entries:

Ardsallagh: John Rogers (wire manufacturer); Rosaville: Hugh White (wine merchant); St.Orans: Major-General MacPherson; Walton: Robert Thompson (linen merchant); Kileen: Robert Porter (Director of York St flax mill); Somerset: Doctor William McKeown; Lisbreen House: Major-General Bell; Firmount: Richard Pring (Grattan Chemists); Barnageeha: John McFerran (merchant); Dunlambert: Henry Matier (linen manufacturer); Fortwilliam House: Miss Murray (tobacco manufacturer). Also listed was George Langtry (merchant & ship owner) whose grandson married the famous Jersey Lily, later mistress of Edward VII.

Many place names in the vicinity now carry the names of the old houses there previously:

Jennymount, a battle-mounted house surrounded by many acres of parkland, built in 1785 by Robert Thompson later renamed Castleton.

Mount Collyer, residence of Dr. James Drummond (Unitarian minister) also used as a boys boarding school in the early 1830's.

The Grove, originally inhabited by James Carson in 1807, finally used as the District HQ of the Ulster Special Constabulary before demolition in 1926.

Somerton House, the present day Northern Ireland Hospice, previously the preparatory Dept. of Belfast High School.

The Throne, once the residence of Sir Samuel Ferguson (famous Irish poet) was named by him because it lies close to the MacArt's Fort (Cave Hill). In the fort was reputed to be a coronation throne used by the O'Neill clan.

Ard Righ (situated opposite Park Lodge School and demolished in 1986), was the home of Francis Joseph Biggar (1863-1926), author, lawyer and Gaelic scholar.

Footnote Many homes in this area had turret towers so that the residents (many of whom were ship-owners) could watch the arrival and departure of their vessels and possibly spy on their workers at the docks!

Geraldine Birch

Divis and Black Mountain acquired by National Trust

The National Trust has completed the acquisition of land on Divis and Black Mountain which was previously owned by the Ministry of Defence, and which will enable the people of Belfast to gain access once again to this hilltop, offering previously unseen views across the city, Belfast Lough and five of the six counties of Northern Ireland.

The Trust anticipates that the area will be open to the public during the autumn of this year. Initial work includes constructing paths, fences and signage in the area. Hundreds of volunteers are to be recruited in a cross-community project to provide a real sense of community ownership of the hills. There will also be guided tours, helping people understand the conservation and management issues involved in looking after this important habitat.

This will be a major step forward in public access, and hopefully brings closer the day on which it will be possible to walk unhindered across the hills from Collin to Carnmoney.

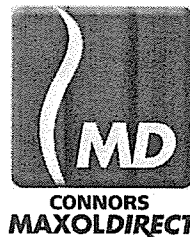
Editor



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Making a difference in the Belfast Hills

For the last few years Katherine Hall (a fellow committee member of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign) and I have been working to improve the environment of a 50 acre site in the Belfast Hills. So far, we have planted over 13,000 native Irish trees such as blackthorn, hawthorn and willow – species which are particularly suited to the climate, insects and wildlife of this area. Whilst there have been many delights and disappointments along the way, we both feel that we have made real progress in improving the environmental value of the site and are looking forward to seeing it come to life over the coming weeks. We are currently at the planning stage of the next phase in our habitat improvement plans. Within the next year we hope to add a number of ponds in order to provide a source of water for birds and mammals and to a spawning ground for frogs, toads and perhaps newts.

Our plans also include retaining an area of upper grassland for the endangered skylark population. Due to overgrazing in previous years the site was not meeting the needs of the skylarks, but a small number had clung on. We are now lucky enough to have six breeding pairs and hope that this year will add a few more to the growing population. We also intend to create a habitat for a local sand-martin population that have been displaced from their home by human encroachment. This is the most risky of our projects as it may be hard to relocate a floundering population, but if we don't try we'll never know if it is possible!

A wild flower meadow is another improvement which we hope to make over the coming months and we hope that this will attract all different types of butterfly. By adding a number of native wild flower species we intend to complement the surrounding woodland, wetland and heathland to create a mini eco-system that will enable a number of species to co-exist thereby further improving the conservation value of the site for all forms of local wildlife.

If anyone is interested in participating in our efforts over the summer period and is prepared to help us to achieve some of the above, your help would be much appreciated! I can be contacted on 90848551.

Martin McDowell

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Grey Squirrels are here to stay

Grey squirrels have been present on the Cave Hill for several years while reds have been absent for at least twenty years. So the reds had gone from the area long before the greys appeared. Love them or hate them – the grey of the species seems to be here to stay.

The grey squirrel is a native of the forests of the eastern United States and was introduced to Ireland in 1911 when a wedding gift consisting of three pairs were released in Castle Forbes estate in Co Longford. Their descendants have now spread throughout much of the country and have been highly successful in establishing themselves.

Grey squirrels are primarily seed eaters but they will eat a wide range of foodstuffs, including shoots, buds, flowers, bark, lichens, mosses, adult insects and larvae, and even birds eggs and nestlings. In some places, they cause considerable damage to trees through bark-stripping. Beech, sycamore and oak are the most frequently attacked species but other favourites include birch, ash, hornbeam, maple and sweet chestnut. A further problem with greys is the serious threat they pose to the important hazel wood habitat area above the zoo. The problem with grey squirrels is that they strip the hazel nuts in September, before they are ripe enough to germinate. As a result, the hazel woods fail to regenerate naturally. This has become a serious problem in England, in areas where no attempt is made to control the number of greys.

Grey squirrels live for eight to nine years, which is roughly double the lifespan of the red, and are also adept at scavenging for food in urban areas. Many of us can already confirm that they are good at raiding bird tables and trashing nut feeders (you can get squirrel-proof feeders but they cost more). Depending on food supply, they can breed twice a year and usually produce three young per litter.

The red squirrel is one of our oldest animals, having arrived in Ireland at the end of the last Ice Age about 10,000 years ago. But it was in fact driven to extinction during the 18th century, as a result of deforestation and over-hunting for pelts. It was reintroduced from England during the 19th century and our current population of reds is derived from these reintroductions. Studies have shown that as soon as the grey colonises an area, the red disappears. It has been suggested that the greys carry a disease (parapoxvirus) to which they are immune but when they pass this on to the resident reds it proves fatal.

Red squirrels favour large areas of mature, coniferous woodland and some of our large conifer plantations are providing a haven for them. The reds require the presence of species such as Norway spruce and Scots pine and the greys also avoid areas dominated by Sitka spruce. It could be that the much-maligned conifer plantations will help the reds to survive in Ireland.

Editor

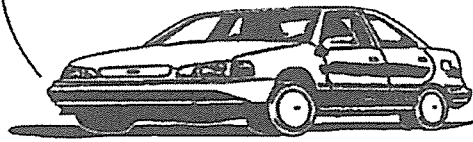
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