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Conservation Campaign  
May 2005

# The Cave Hill CAMPAIGNER



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## New hope or false dawn on the planning front?

The long-awaited draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan issued earlier this year represents a major break with previous planning priorities, and for the better. Environmentalists can only welcome its commitment to "a compact metropolitan area with a protected environmental setting".

As Cormac Hamill reports inside, the draft plan offers protective status of one kind or another to the whole of the Cave Hill. It also does so for the wider Belfast Hills area where the entire *Belfast basalt escarpment* from Black Mountain to the Cave Hill is designated as an AOHSV or Area of High Scenic Value. This is of course a draft plan, and in the coming period we can expect every kind of developer to try and push back its apparent constraints. Around the perimeter of the Cave Hill we expect the following to be pressure points: the hill fringes of Glengormley, Hightown Road and Mallusk, the Horseshoe Bend, and the last remaining area of farmland above the top of the Upper Cave Hill Road. In these areas private developers will be applying the pressure.

In one other crucial area, the old zoo at Bellevue, the City Council has already tried to influence future designation, in the hope of windfall profits, by having the area opened up for residential development. We believe that this is an area that should be opened up for free public use creating a linear park running from the Belfast Castle to the zoo entrance. As the Council elections loom, you should ask your North Belfast candidates to support this option.

The draft BMAP suggests that even some of its stronger designations are not immune to future development. Thus with regard to SLNCI's (Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance), there is a developer's get out clause: "*Where exceptionally development is permitted which might adversely affect the nature conservation value, the Department will endeavour to ensure that such adverse effects are kept to a minimum.*" Of course!



Confidence that the Department of Environment can properly serve the environment, and actually deliver a strong BMAP has been severely undermined by the well disguised announcement on the eve of Good Friday by Minister, Angela Smith, of approval for no less than three super dumps on the fringes of the Belfast Hills at Aughrim, Cottonmount, and Mullaghglass. All are within the Belfast basalt escarpment which the draft BMAP, and her department, are simultaneously planning to designate as an area of High Scenic Value!

As is so often the case with respect to the environment, laudable sentiments are all too easily overwhelmed by destructive commercial priorities. The dumps announcement shows how blatantly this is already happening in this case.

JOHN GRAY

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The Cave Hill Campaigner is published by the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign, c/o 19 Glandore Avenue, Belfast Bt15 3FB  
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# The Belfast Hills Partnership has landed

*The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign has been involved since the early 1990's in efforts to ensure an overall approach to the problems of the Belfast Hills. This has culminated in the new Belfast Hills Partnership, and we welcome Partnership Manager Jim Bradley's overview of the issues which the new body is facing – John Gray*

After years of hard work, late nights, reports, debate and setbacks, the Belfast Hills Partnership has finally arrived. Launched in February 2005, the Partnership is the culmination of years of work by a variety of groups from the community, commercial, agricultural, government, sport and environmental sectors. This very breadth of interests means that the Partnership can carry some clout with respect to some issues, while having to take a balanced approach with regard to other issues on which partners may have differing opinions.

## Objective

The main objective of the Partnership is to provide a practical way of integrating management of the Belfast Hills which is carried out by a whole range of public and private bodies and individuals.

## Who and where

We are currently based at the Colin Glen Forest Park Centre, which has been a very welcoming and useful first base. Currently we have three staff, but the range of work that needs to be done is such that we must expand our staff as soon as new funding is found. We will probably be looking for new premises shortly.

## Waste

Most would agree that this is the number one issue in the Belfast hills at the minute, with the high levels of illegal fly tipping and landfill to date plus the recent announcement of planning approvals for major landfill sites based at Aughrim, Mullaghglass and Cottonmount. Whether you agree with these approvals or not, this means a very high proportion of Northern Ireland's waste will probably end up buried in and around the Belfast Hills. The impact on aspects such as landscape, traffic and other environmental effects of these combined has not been investigated. It is therefore timely that Belfast Hills Partnership is carrying out a Strategic Environmental Assessment of present and future waste management in the Belfast Hills area. This will hopefully show the overall impact of waste management, legal and illegal, on this unique area. It will also make recommendations both to control and to positively manage this key industry in the hills. Watch this space!

## Planning

One of our first jobs after starting up was to respond to the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan or BMAP as it is known. Impor,

## Campaigning Events

**Cleanup day** is Saturday 7 May. Meet at north car-park (near Adventure Playground) at 2 pm. Please wear appropriate clothing and footwear.

**Annual General Meeting** is on Wednesday 25 May at Fortwilliam Golf Club at 7.30 pm. The meeting will include a talk by Jim Bradley 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 5 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 can help by volunteering for a two hour shift, please get in touch.

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tant aspects affecting the Belfast hills include the development stop-line and proposed housing areas on its edge, access points to the hills and a wide range of nature conservation designations to name a few. In addition to this, the Partnership regularly reviews and comments on key development proposals such as for large housing, landfill and recycling projects.

## Access

This is a key issue for many in the Belfast hills, with some pushing for access generally across the hills while others have grave concerns in terms of impact on farming and landowners' liability. The Partnership can play a vital role in making sure both sides hear and understand the other's views. We need to actively manage existing access, making sure that visitors understand where they are welcome or should avoid and also how to behave. The acquisition of Divis by the National Trust is a watershed moment for the Hills and will help bring a lot of these related issues and opportunities to the fore.

## Agricultural support

This is a time of great change for farmers in Northern Ireland, with Single Farm Payments and the Nitrates Directive greatly altering local agriculture. Farms in the hills, being marginal land, are particularly vulnerable to such changes. We need to do our utmost in supporting our farmers during this time and also helping with problems specific to urban / rural fringe farming such as chronically high levels of vandalism, including fire setting and indiscriminate use of scramblers and quads.

## Biodiversity

Many of you will know that there are still parts of the hills which are not only like the wilds of Donegal or the Glens of Antrim but also have similar wildlife. There are lots of changes afoot, with Biodiversity Officers recently appointed for Belfast, Newtownabbey and Antrim to write action plans for key habitats. Our role will be to help ensure that they cover the Belfast hills with plans for upland heath, key species such as Irish hare and Curlew and also to take a lead in writing and carrying out these plans if necessary.

## Awareness & Volunteering

Amongst all this work, we will be ensuring that as many people become more aware of the fantastic resource the Belfast hills are and the threats and issues that they face. We are doing this through events, press releases and articles such as this one! If you want to know more about our work, our events or would like to register as a potential volunteer to help us with our programme, please get in touch via phone (028) 90603466 or email us at [info@belfasthills.org](mailto:info@belfasthills.org). More details are on our website: [www.belfasthills.org](http://www.belfasthills.org).

Jim Bradley - Partnership Manager

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# The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP)

BMAP is a very comprehensive development plan at present being drawn up which will guide planners in the Belfast area up to the year 2015. The draft document was published in December 2004 and submissions were sought by a January 2005 deadline. Within a fairly short (but unspecified) time BMAP will replace any other development guides.

Its stated aim is as follows: "To provide a planning framework which is in general conformity with the RDS (*the Regional development Strategy, drawn up by the Assembly in 2001*) in facilitating sustainable growth and a high quality of development in the Belfast Metropolitan Area throughout the Plan period, whilst protecting and where appropriate, enhancing the natural and man-made environment of the Plan Area"

The aspects of the Plan which have drawn the Campaign's attention have been its declared intention to protect and enhance the natural environment and we have given close scrutiny to its implications in the immediate area of Cave Hill. We have submitted a written response to the document which in broad terms welcomed its proposals. As it stands at present, BMAP appears to have taken its conservation role seriously. It intends "to limit expansion at the periphery of built-up areas and to promote regeneration within" and to promote "the development of healthier lifestyles... through increased provision for walking and cycling facilities"

To help it in its conservation role, BMAP has proposed various designations which will convey different degrees of protection against development. The Belfast Basalt Escarpment is to be designated an Area of High Scenic Value (AOHSV); this area stretches from Carnmoney Hill to beyond Colin mountain, along the skyline. There are to be two Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPA) near us: around Fortwilliam golf course up to Throne Wood and also the Carr's Glen area. There are to be four relevant Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCI). These are the whole of the Belfast Hills Area, an area around the zoo entrance road, an area behind the zoo and virtually the whole of the Cave Hill and Colinward area. These areas are all additionally designated Areas of Constraint on Mineral Development. The whole of the Cavehill Country Park to the east of the escarpment is to be designated an Urban Landscape Wedge. These are open areas where planning permission will be granted only for recreational uses with various provisos and safeguards. Belfast Castle grounds and Bellevue (Belfast Zoo) are to be ranked among the Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes.

If the Plan is implemented as presently drafted, all these designations should provide a great deal of protection to our open spaces around Cave Hill. However, it is well to bear in mind that these designations do not provide absolute protection against all development. They merely provide a framework against which development proposals will be assessed. But BMAP's protection, nevertheless, will be better than that provided at present. There is one other caveat: the document has yet to incorporate submissions made by various interested bodies such as builders and developers. The results of their lobbying will only become clear with the publication of the actual plan and when that happens, we will need to scrutinise it again. I contacted the Planning office in March this year (2005) to check progress on the implementation of BMAP. At present, following the consultation process, submissions are

being considered preliminary to holding a public enquiry. It appears that that enquiry will probably not take place until early 2006. The public enquiry may throw up issues which will need further discussion, which means that no one can predict when the development process will draw to a close. Best guesses are that it may not be until some time in 2008 that we might expect BMAP to be in place. It is generally assumed that the years that the plan will be in force will be extended beyond 2015 to compensate for the delay in its implementation.

Cormac E Hamill

## The Waterworks safe?

Last year we headlined disastrous plans to build a leisure centre in the Waterworks Park. At the time this plan was enthusiastically supported by both Sinn Fein and the SDLP, who were in a race to prove who could get a leisure centre for Nationalist North Belfast first. That race is still on, but happily the Waterworks is no longer going to be its victim. No sudden environmental conversion has taken place, but we now know that Girdwood Barracks is to close and the seven acre site there should provide ample space for both new housing and a leisure centre. It is a welcome solution.

It is also good to see that Queen Mary's Gardens, at the Antrim Road corner of the park, is being re-landscaped. Is it too much to hope that the Council will go on from there, and deal with the dereliction elsewhere in the Waterworks?

John Gray



◆ DEJAVU

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# FOLK WHO LIVE NEAR THE HILL

A fascinating aerial photograph of North Belfast was taken in 1928 by a *Belfast Newsletter* photographer, Robert Martin, from a Shorts *Calcutta* flying boat. It shows clearly how the area around Cavehill has been developed in the years since then. It shows that the lough side of the Antrim Road between Fortwilliam and Gray's Lane had, already been substantially built on. The development of the northern side had halted briefly at the Cavehill Road but by the 1930s development had resumed. Prosperous modern villas of the type celebrated in the poetry of John Betjeman, "recalling laurel, shrubs and privet," now stretched themselves along the lower slopes of Cave Hill. One of the features of the inter-war period was the development around cities of extensive urban fringes. In the nineteenth century most accommodation in industrial centres such as Belfast was rented. The modern preoccupation with owner-occupation did not develop until after the First World War, when great numbers of houses like those then built on the Antrim Road were built by the new middle classes with the aid of building society loans. This expansion was encouraged by the development of both public and private transport.

Where houses led the way, other developments followed. In 1935 Belfast Royal Academy, after a surprisingly prolonged bout of agonising, purchased land on the lower slopes of Cave Hill from Lord Shaftesbury for development as playing fields, and as the site of a preparatory school. In due course trees were removed, the area levelled and the Castle Grounds, as the facility was named, were prepared by the landscape gardener who had recently laid out the new grounds for the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont. The Academy became increasingly anxious to secure the purchase when it suspected that the elusive 9<sup>th</sup> Earl, whose circumstances had obliged him to present the estate and the Castle to the City in 1934, was negotiating with another school in the area. The

school in question was apparently the Dominican Convent which in the 1930s took over 'Walton' an Italianate sandstone house at Fortwilliam, originally built by the nineteenth century linen merchant Henry Kirk, and which, as the architectural historian Paul Larmour points out, is one of the few surviving mansions of the old private park. This had extended from the Antrim Road to the Shore Road, contained many detached residences, and was made exclusive with gates, of which only the piers remain, at each end. Additions to the college were made after the Second World War and now Fortwilliam School has a new and conspicuously modern building.

Belfast's Jewish community is strongly identified with the northern suburbs of the city. Active in the commercial life of Belfast its numbers peaked at around 1,400 in the 1940s when, boosted by fugitives from fascist persecution in Europe and living mainly on the Antrim and Somerton Roads. A new community centre and synagogue was opened on the Somerton Road in 1964, replacing the previous Annesley Street building and itself reflecting the outward movement of the community along the Antrim Road in the previous half century. Designed by Eugene Rosenberg, the synagogue has been described as one of the most accomplished modern buildings in Belfast. In recent years the area surrounding the Cave Hill has changed again. But ill-considered development threatens the balance between heritage and the needs of a growing community. Unrestricted property speculation and political opportunism, if not contested by those who live in the area may undermine both the natural environment of Cave Hill and what remains of the neighbourhood's historical and architectural legacy.

Edward McCamley



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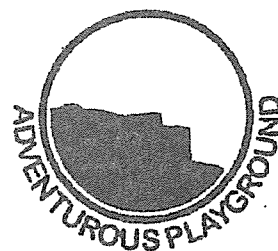
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## BOOK REVIEW

# Wild Belfast by Robert Scott

(Blackstaff Press £12.99)

This is a sumptuous book. It is profusely illustrated with photographs and high-quality drawings, something on every page and everything is in colour. Of course, these high production values are needed to do justice to the theme: a survey of all the wildlife to be found in Greater Belfast, from Holywood round to Carrickfergus and down the Lagan valley towards Lisburn. The book has been subsidised by the Environment and Heritage service of the Department of the Environment and supported by Belfast City Council and this is reflected in the price. This book looks and feels as if it were much dearer.

It is by no means comprehensive nor does it purport to be. A full survey would require a book many times thicker than this and would be beyond the capabilities of any one person. But it does give representative illustrations and descriptions of much that we could observe. It is not a reference book. It cannot be used for systematic identification and it is too large to be carried on any outing. Such books tend to be dry. This book is much more; it is an invitation to get out and look, to walk and fossick and find and observe something of the wonderful range of animal and plant life, all within easy reach of our homes. Robert Scott's tone is idiosyncratic and discursive. His personality shows through as he takes the reader on strolls in various locations in Belfast. He wears his learning lightly; he has a PhD in Botany and is Conservation and Education Officer with Belfast City Council. The text not only describes plants and animals but also gives peripheral

but useful information. He says, for example that the emphasis in park management in Belfast has changed in recent years from manicure and neatness to providing wildlife refuges. And he also sketches in the background to the Bog Meadows. Reading his prose is very like listening to a good teacher. He addresses the task in hand, uses illustrations superbly and yet is prepared to go off at a slight tangent as the opportunity presents. For example, pignuts were referred to as poor man's truffle and eating the roots of yarrow can induce prophetic dreams!

What about our own Cave Hill area? He has a section at the back where he selects twenty wildlife areas and gives details about access and location and some species information. We are close to four of these areas - Hazelwood, Cave Hill Country Park, Belfast Castle Estate and the Waterworks. But the species information in these sections is very sparse - much more is embedded in the main text in the book where he takes a habitat approach and deals with the inner city, gardens, parks and open spaces, meadows, wetlands, ponds and lakes, waterways, coastal areas, hills and mountains and finally woodlands. References to Cave Hill and the Castle estate abound. They can all be found through the very comprehensive index but it is much more rewarding to sit down and read the text through; there is so much to learn and savour.

Two small quibbles - on page 28 he mentions people leaving out a welcome saucer of milk for hedgehogs. I think that this practice is not encouraged by those who are involved with hedgehogs - pet food is recommended instead. And on page 27 he credits slugs and snails with possessing an efficient set of teeth. In fact these gastropods don't chomp - they feed by rasping with a serrated tongue.

This is a book to be treasured. I found time and again that I was making mental notes to look for this or that on Cave Hill; the butterfly orchid that grows on the top of Cave Hill; the red broomrape that grows close to the caves and the moschatel, Belfast's rarest plant which Robert Foster tells us is growing in a small colony somewhere in the Castle estate.

Buy this book, read it and as I have, make your own list of things to find on the wonderful wildlife resource on our very doorsteps.

Cormac E Hamill



# wild belfast

 on safari in the city

Robert Scott



Book cover published courtesy of Blackstaff Press

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# Millennium Herb and Maze Update

Late last year the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign was delighted to receive a grant from the lottery under "Awards for all Northern Ireland Programme." This will enable us to continue restocking and improving both the herb garden and the millennium maze.

I think of the herb garden as a peaceful little oasis of organically grown herbs. It is situated in what was once the old kitchen garden of Belfast Castle and can be found on your left hand side as you come down the Italian stone staircase at the rear of the building. Shortly there will be a brochure available with information about the herb garden and the maze, both of which were planted in the year 2000. The maze has 2,500 sturdy young beech trees. In October we intend to add another 500. All in all, this has been a massive undertaking but the results will eventually be spectacular. The maze is just north of the children's adventure playground on the site of the old Castle rose garden. A good view of it can be had from MacArt's Fort.

The herb garden should be looking its best in June when all is in full bloom and you are invited to sample all the different herbs on display. They are all well marked and labelled on slate (taken from the roof of the castle during the refurbishment in 2003 - recycling at its best). There is also a water tap on the wall beside the garden seat where you can wash your samples. If you listen to the gardening programme on Radio Ulster you will be familiar with the name Barbara Pilcher. In 2004 she gave two very informative and entertaining talks on herbs and their everyday uses in the home. Barbara has been an invaluable source of knowledge and encouragement since the start of the project.

The healthy looking plants you see in the Castle herb garden all came from Lisdoonan Herbs, 98 Belfast Rd Saintfield, which is run by Barbara. If you would like details of workshops she organises or a catalogue, go to her website which is at [www.lisdoonanherbs.dial.pipex.com](http://www.lisdoonanherbs.dial.pipex.com) or telephone 90813624. Barbara has also written a reference book called *Have a Herb* which is pocket-sized and very handy for reference if you are in a garden centre. If you want to treat yourself to an informative and colourful hard-backed book then you look no further than *New Book of Herbs* by Jekka McVicar, or her previous one *Jekka's Complete Herb Book*. These are also available in your local library.

Growing herbs can be addictive, but believe me, the pleasure of tasting your own plants makes it all worthwhile. Hopefully, having read this article you might consider planting your own herb garden or if you are walking around the Belfast Castle, make your way down to the millennium herb garden. If you see any volunteers working in the garden or maze, why not stop for a chat? You might even be persuaded to join the Cavehill Conservation campaign!

**Geraldine Birch**

*The Cavehill Campaigner* • 6

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## Mobile phones, masts – time to think again?

Before long there could be a new mobile phone mast beside Cavehill Primary School at the top of Old Cavehill Road. In February, the Belfast Telegraph printed a planning application for a Vodafone mast to be erected on the Ballyahagan reservoir site beside the newly rebuilt school.

Most of us are already aware of the uproar over the siting of mobile phone masts. There have been a number of very high profile cases, as many people are concerned about the health risks and do not want the masts located close to their homes, schools and public areas. There was a campaign in our own locality when one was proposed at the Cavehill Bowling Club and another was proposed to be sited on the footpath at the top of the Cavehill Road. Neither mast was erected due to public protest.

Recently, a lot of effort has been made by pressure groups to gather evidence of 'cancer clusters' around masts. The reasoning is that when near masts our bodies receive constant signals from them that prevent the production of the hormone melatonin that aids restful sleep and allows our bodies to recover from the activities of the day. Effects in humans have been reported to be phantom pains in various parts of the body, and disturbed sleep, headaches and nausea.

So do mobile phone masts and using mobile phones damage our health? The only thing certain is that there has not been enough time yet to research the long term effects. However, anecdotal evidence and initial research are extremely disturbing. This year alone we have come a long way to proving there are serious ill effects to either living or working near a mast and the prolonged use of mobile phones. It has recently been proven that radio waves from mobile phones can harm body cells and damage DNA. A four-year study, co-ordinated by the German research group Verum, studied the effects of

radiation on animal and human cells in a laboratory. They found that after being exposed to electromagnetic fields, the cells showed a significant increase in DNA damage which could not always be repaired by the cell. Damage was also seen in the next generation of cells. Mutated cells are seen as a possible cause of cancer. The research is currently being repeated in advance of publication.

A recent study in the Netherlands, by the reputable Organisation for Applied Scientific Research, suggested a correlation between masts, 3G signals and poor health. And in January this year, the UK's Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation produced an update to the government-backed Stewart report on mobiles in 2000. The update, *Health Effects from Radio Frequency Electromagnetic Fields*, concluded that much of the research so far had been inadequate both in scope and methodology.

Children, in particular, could be more vulnerable to radiation from mobile handsets because their nervous systems are still developing and their tissues may absorb more radiation than adults. Stewart recommended that children under 16 should restrict mobile-phone use to essential calls and keep call lengths to a minimum, a view endorsed by the British Medical Association and the Department of Health. But how many parents know this and restrict their mobile phone usage?

One thing is certain: you would be advised to check your mobile phone (and particularly those of your children) and check your SAR level. This is the specific absorption rate - the amount of radiation which will be transferred into your head from your phone. In simple terms, the lower the level, the safer the phone will be.

So all we know for now is that many scientists do not believe that mobile phones and masts are as safe as the phone companies would have us believe. Initial research has given us justifiable cause for concern. Do we really want to take chances with our health or is it time to think again? I for one know that I am very unhappy at the plans to site a mast next to Cavehill Primary School.

**Martin McDowell**

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# THE CAVE HILL UNTHRONED

Sir Samuel Ferguson is one of the most celebrated literary figures with North Belfast associations. A Presbyterian by background, he was also a romantic enthusiast for the ancient history of Ireland. His story *Corby MacGillmore* was actually set on the Cave Hill and deals with imagined conflicts of medieval times. Even when dealing with facts Ferguson was a romantic, and in 1833 he gave birth to the Cave Hill 'throne' in a letter to the celebrated antiquary, Sir George Petrie:

*Pray do you know whether the inauguration of Irish kings was uniformly by placing the foot in a track of its shape, or did they ever employ the hand? My reason for asking is that I think what is generally called the Giant's Chair on top of the Cave Hill has been a crowning stone. But instead of the impression of a foot, I find on one of the arms of the seat a hole, to all appearances artificial (vulgarly called the Giant's snuff box), which is just the shape of the inside of a glove, and fits the right hand pretty exactly. The stone in which it is, seems to have been brought thither. The others appear part of the rock. If that was the O'Neills' crowning-stone in Lower Claneboy, they must have had a fine view on the coronation day...*

We don't know how Petrie replied, but we do know that he had already written about the crowning seat of the O'Neills which had been located in Castlereagh in the eighteenth century and which survives in the Ulster Museum to this day. We also know that the inauguration of Irish kings or chieftains usually involved a flat stone or *leac* rather than a chair or throne.

Ferguson's speculation might never have reached a wider audience if it had not been for the publication in 1896 of a biography by his widow, *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of his day*. She brought to light the old speculation of 1833 and she did so just as Alice Milligan and a group of associates with strong North Belfast connections launched *The Shan Van Vocht*, a gaelic revivalist and Irish separatist magazine. A major focus of its brief history was the memory of the United Irishmen and the centenary commemorations planned for 1898.

What was already well known was the symbolic importance of MacArts Fort in the history of the United Irish enterprise. It was here that in the summer of 1795 Wolfe Tone and others had sworn 'never to desist until they had freed Ireland from English tyranny'. Now Ferguson's resurrected letter of 1833 added an extra dimension – perhaps the oath of 1795 had been deliberately sworn by the throning seat of the old chieftains? This proposition was made in the 4<sup>th</sup> December 1896 issue of *The Shan Van Vocht* and by August 1897, in planning the 1898 commemoration they were contemplating a banner showing 'MacArts Fort ... and a reminder of the vow of Tone'. On New Year's Eve, as 1898 dawned, the '98 Ulster Provincial Executive met at MacArts Fort and amongst other resolutions predictably repeated verbatim the oath of 1795.

## *As I Roved Out*

And yet if we are to believe Cathal O'Byrne in his well known collection of Belfast tales, *As I roved out*, they were no longer able to make their pledge alongside a presumed throne. As he *The Cavehill Campaigner* • 8

describes it, opponents of any commemoration had picked up on that first reference in the December 1896 edition of *The Shan Van Vocht*:

*A number of workmen were engaged in placing iron rail-posts on either side of the pathway leading up to the hill. One of these rail-posts was used as a lever by the vandals of that day, and the stone of the Coronation Chair containing the imprint of the hand was sent hurtling down over the precipice into the green coomb, hundreds of feet below.*

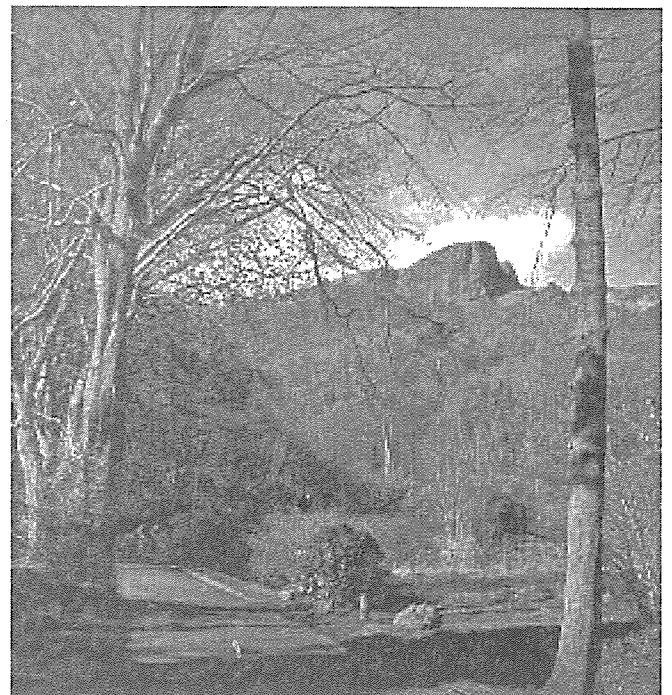
There is as yet no other direct confirmation of this incident, though there is the circumstantial evidence of a contemporary sketch by J.W Carey of workmen engaged in erecting a fence close to McArts Fort. There is definitely no sign there today of any stone of a kind that even the most fevered imagination could convert into a throne!

For O'Byrne it was a case of gone but not forgotten. A determined Nationalist, and admirer of Alice Milligan, he concluded his tale of the 'throne' with a determined re-affirmation of its authenticity: *Who can doubt but that Sir Samuel Ferguson's suggestion was the correct one – that the Stone chair on the top of Cave Hill was the original inaugural Throne used at the installation of the great O'Neills.*

O'Byrne's account was first published as an article in the *Irish News*, and then included in the first edition of *As I roved out* in 1946. The enduring popularity of this collection, with new editions in 1957 and 1982, means that in popular understanding the notion of a throne on the Cave Hill lives on. The tale of the 'throne' is in fact no more than a good example of the victory of romantic imagination over facts.

## JOHN GRAY

My thanks for assistance to Liz Curtis, whose pamphlet, *The Throne Hospital and its Surroundings: Fact, Fable and Conjecture*, is due for publication later this year by North Belfast Tourism.





## The Land of the White Crow

A small area of land in the Belfast Hills was acquired a few years ago with the intention of returning it to nature. Early in April, I went for a stroll round the fields and moors nearby. No wild flowers to see – the primroses long since eradicated by over-grazing and pesticides. On the moor-land were charred clumps of gorse, the remains of last year's vandalism. Unfortunately, this is now an annual event on the Belfast Hills, killing ground-nesting birds and animals. I met a native who lamented the disappearance of pheasant and hare. He asked how the land got its name and I told him that in the past a pure white crow had often been seen over this moor, although not for many years now. As I walked on, I gathered litter blown from lorries on their way to landfill sites and saw the black plastic strips caught on the barbed wire fences. Soon I was trailing a sack full of rubbish and it seemed to me that the whole area was treated as a dump. My dog shared my dejection.

Then I glanced back and caught the sunlight as it brightened the first hint of green from some of the 11,000 native trees which have been planted here in the past few years, some already near two metres tall. And I reminded myself that this landscape was changing from an area of over-grazed fields to a woodland of growing diversity, where primrose and wood sorrel can hope to flourish. As the dog bounced across the heather he raised both a skylark and a flock of meadow pipits. As I listened to the twittering lark, I took comfort from the fact that the future habitat for these birds is now assured. The long hedgerows which frame and divide the land were planted as a community effort. Soon they will froth with the white flowers of the blackthorn and next winter they will offer more food and shelter to a wider variety of birdlife.

I glanced over towards Belfast, below the hills and looking almost beautiful and renewed in a soft azure light, after the April downpour. In the distance a solitary bird ascended, too far away to identify, and circled for a moment until it finally merged into the shadow of the hillside. And I wondered, could this be the white crow returned to reclaim his kingdom?

Katherine Hall

## Lynda Logan

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## Future of the Zoo in question?

A visioning process with regard to the future of Belfast Zoo has led to some far more fundamental questions being asked at the April City Council meeting. Ulster Unionist, Chris McGimpsey, announced that he planned to start a campaign to close 'the abomination on Cave Hill', his colleague Davy Browne also stated his opposition to zoos, and Alliance's Naomi Long argued that 'just because something is popular doesn't make it right'. In the opposite camp were Ulster Unionist, Jim Rodgers, and the DUP's Nelson McCausland and Ian Crozier. All councillors should be worried about the enormous cost of running the Zoo – the estimates for 2005/6 indicate running costs of £1.5 million, and a total outlay, including capital costs, of £2.1 million. According to Councillor McGimpsey, it is costing Belfast ratepayers £40,000 per week, despite attracting 200,000 visitors a year. Indeed, the only time that the Zoo ever made a profit was during the Second World War, after the more dangerous animals had been shot as a security measure!

There is a growing debate worldwide about the morality of zoos. These questions were last asked here in the 1970's when the old zoo came within an ace of closure. Nobody can deny that the conditions at the zoo have greatly improved since the new development and re-siting in the 1980's, but the propriety of keeping wild animals used to roaming hundreds or thousands of acres in warmer climes on small pockets of land on the dank north face of Cave Hill, has to remain open to serious question. Much is made now of breeding programmes for rare animals, but this remains a fig leaf for the captivity of the vast majority of zoo animals that are neither rare nor endangered. We support Chris McGimpsey and others prepared to ask the fundamental question: Is it right in this day and age that our Council should intern wild animals at our expense?

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The economics are not great; the installation cost over £15,000 and although I got grants of about £10,000, at present prices I will not recover my money for about twenty years. But I will get my money back eventually and if energy costs start to rise rapidly in the future, as I suspect they will, the pay-back time will be quite a bit shorter. In the meantime, I am contributing less to the emission of carbon dioxide into the air through reduced electricity generation at the power station and that generates a large feel-good factor. The system tells me how many kilograms of carbon dioxide I have saved. It also tells me how much power is being generated at any time and keeps a running total of the energy produced by the system. The power varies from zero at night to about 2,500 watts at noon on a sunny day. The system is maintenance free and should generate about half my electricity needs over the next twenty to thirty years.

The installation took three days and was hassle-free. Planning permission is not needed and the arrays of solar panels are thin and lie very flat on the roof. The system is automatic - whenever my electricity demands are greater than that supplied by the solar cells, the surplus comes in through the meter and whenever I generate more than I need, it is exported to the National Grid. This surplus will be paid for next year when NIE installs a meter which will monitor this outgoing power. The intention is that I will be paid perhaps about 6p a unit.

The grants at present are favourable but they may not always be so. Apparently the Government is to review its commitment to alternative energy sources next October (2005) with a view to offering greater support to other such sources such as Wind Power and this may result in reduced grants for solar installations. If you intend sometime to get it, now may be the time. You will get your money back eventually, you take a substantial amount of money from the government and you are reducing the toxic load on the environment. That cannot be bad!

More information can be got by contacting the Energy Saving Trust ([www.est.org.uk](http://www.est.org.uk)) and they will supply a list of accredited installers along with a lot of useful background ([www.est.org.uk/solar/how/finding.cfm](http://www.est.org.uk/solar/how/finding.cfm)). My installation was done by a young local firm - Horizon Solar – and I was very satisfied with them.

In the meantime I look forward to lots of sunshine!

**Cormac E Hamill**

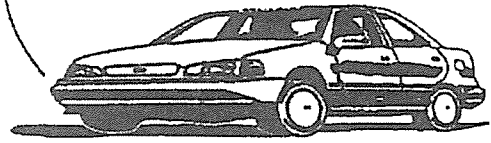
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# CREATIVE ENERGY UNDER CAVE HILL

## A continuation of "Artistic Walking Tour" In The Cave Hill Campaigner May 2004

Much has changed since the ceasefires were announced nearly a decade ago.

The physical face of North Belfast has erupted with new apartments and tidy Executive housing. More people than ever are out and about, taking the air or casually talking and walking. The Waterworks is used like it was before the mayhem of the 70's, 80's and 90's forced minds to flee inside the safety of houses and homes. Even there, a deathly atmosphere could be felt. Even though a stasis is suggested by radio and television, cities seem to have their own kind of energy, changing like the wind over Cave Hill.

The other day I walked up Duncairn Gardens. When traffic stopped near the Antrim Road, I noticed a blue plaque above a doorway. This was where the intelligent and eccentric John Luke lived. I cannot say if The Dancers was painted here but I had a feeling of awe when I looked up, for this son of The North created a shadow deep and internationally known. The lights changed and on I went, knowing that the depth of the shadow in North Belfast hadn't just been made by violent men, a shadow crafted by a wonderful, sensitive being whose work is valued today more than antique furniture.

As I waked on in the direction of The Cavehill Gallery I passed a street where the painter Brendan Ellis lives. The first time I saw his haunting figures was in the blocked-up windows of derelict buildings near Short Strand. Serious and powerful, the life he depicted was expressionist and craftily coloured. His craftsmanship captured the movement of bodies and places in city streets and the balconies of tenement flats. There was a visible sense of compassion and empathy here, one seldom seen on canvases of shallower hands. However, this is all part of the territories of the mind in North Belfast.

The Cavehill Gallery is owned by Joe and Catherine McWilliams. With their son Simon they make an important trio which any city should be glad to celebrate. My favourite work of Joe's is the Orange parade near The Irish News Offices. Like Catherine, his work covers forty years and anyone interested in his valuable contribution to the arts in Belfast should peruse his catalogue. Catherine's work ranges from landscapes of Donegal, Sligo, Cushendall and Cave Hill to wonderful still lives. Bold and imaginative, her work captures the landscape and the viewer with force. Simon is making a big impression on the contemporary scene here and abroad. It must be great fun when the three of them are discussing work under the one roof! The Gallery has been an excellent forum for dozens of painters like Dan Dowling. I wish them well. Another artist of some import is Liam De Frinse who lives in the immediate area.

Three writers of significance live under Cave Hill, three whose work and names are known to the world of poetry here and abroad. Cairan Carson is Professor of the Seamus Heaney school of Poetry at Queens. His work has a sharp, vernacular quality which allows the reader to revisit with pleasure and enjoyment. It is serious and comments on the life of the city with a quirky ease. Medbh McGuckin lives close to Fortwilliam Golf Club. Winner of numerous prizes, her poetry requires an integration from the reader lest her words slip through the fingers like sand. Witty and urbane, she creates a world as feminine and pure as Helen Waddell.

Undoubtedly, the poets' poet, Frank Ormsby is the third part of this trio. His poetry and anthologies of Ulster writing are to be found in most bookshops. Originally from Fermanagh, he has lived most of his adult life in Belfast where he teaches at Inst. If you don't know the work of these three, treat yourself to one of their books.

If it's music you are after, look no further than Lansdowne Road. Jane Cassidy and Maurice Leydon have made a mark on the folk music and collecting scene. Jane has produced several albums of traditional songs to date. A producer of educational programmes in the BBC, one of her main loves has been the making of a musical drama on the life of Mary Anne McCracken. Maurice has done a valuable job collecting and publishing Belfast Street Songs. They are a musical history of our past and deserve to be in schools and colleges.

And lastly, there is the violinist Darragh Morgan, whose cv grows larger by the week. A devoted exponent of contemporary as well as traditional classical music who has travelled and played over the world, and, who has just returned to London after leading the South African Orchestra. When home, he resides with his father Tom Morgan the poet and his mum under Cave Hill.

I have neither been inclusive or exclusive in this article. For instance, I haven't had space to include the many craft workers whose reside in North Belfast. Perhaps this can be done another time. My intention has been to give a general view of the creative energy under Cave Hill and to counter-balance the often bad notice our area gets in a superficial press.

Tom Morgan.

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1. Val Chile \_\_\_\_\_
2. Booze Flats \_\_\_\_\_
3. U be level \_\_\_\_\_
4. O who lazed \_\_\_\_\_
5. La Drastic Hullo *or*  
I Should Call Rat \_\_\_\_\_
6. Grab Red Hen \_\_\_\_\_
7. Hornet \_\_\_\_\_
8. Mum n me lie lazín \_\_\_\_\_
9. Ho Ruler Cheats  
Perfection \_\_\_\_\_
10. Lane Opens Soon \_\_\_\_\_
11. Hard Rig \_\_\_\_\_
12. Mild Lol \_\_\_\_\_
13. Bess Can Dance \_\_\_\_\_
14. Let to Mr. Waster \_\_\_\_\_
15. Spat won the big lunch \_\_\_\_\_
16. NB Made Gain \_\_\_\_\_
17. Angle Ten Here \_\_\_\_\_
18. Heap These *or*  
The Hep Pass \_\_\_\_\_
19. Lovers Tune Well \_\_\_\_\_
20. Faces all bets \_\_\_\_\_

Thanks to Ruairi and Ethne MacClenaghan  
and to Moya Gahan

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## Council says no to closing Castle gates at night

Vandalism, drinking, and unruly behaviour have been a persistent problem in the area of the main gates leading to Belfast Castle. Local residents had proposed to the Council that the gates be closed at night. At the Client Services (Parks and Amenities) Sub-Committee meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January the proposal was rejected. Council officers argued that measures already taken, including increased patrolling of the area, had reduced the difficulty, and that for business and health and safety reasons closure would cause major difficulties for the Castle.

A key argument from GreenSpace in government funded research was also put forward. This '*highlighted the need to manage sites effectively rather than resort to a fortified urban environment*'.

The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign wholeheartedly agrees with this proposition, but, as matters stand, we have to remain sceptical on the ability of the Council 'to manage sites effectively'. While we welcome the end of the disastrous split between parks organisation and staffing supervision, we can remember an earlier era when they were combined and performance was not much better. Certainly residents in the area of the Castle gates will take nothing for granted until they see actual performance, and concerted action to end the problem.

**John Gray**



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