

Hetton-le-Hole Herald

The Newsletter for Hetton Local History Group

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Information & Calendar

New publications :- We have four book currently at the printers which we expect to be ready for sale early in November. 1. Re-publication of the Community Assn. Book of 1973. 2. The 1841 census of Hetton and Easington Lane. 3. Articles by C A Smith. 4. East Rainton by Bob Hope.

November meeting :- Members' research reports.

December :- Commemoration of the Elemore Pit disaster exhibition

The Londonderry Chronicles

During the latter part of the 17th century a significant development in coal mining took place in the Rainton area. The developments were due to the efforts of Sir George Vane who had become a shareholder in the "**Grand Lease**" following the Civil War in the

17th century. This was probably one of the earliest examples of capitalist enterprise and gave rise to the importance of the Rainton area. Most of the coal, found quite close to the surface, was sold within the local area, probably as far away as Durham City which was growing at this time. His great-grandson the Reverend Sir Henry Vane married Frances Tempest, who was the daughter of the owner of a number of pits in the Penshaw and Rainton areas. Thus the Vane Tempest dynasty was formed.

The above mentioned were the grandparents of Frances Anne Emily Vane-Tempest who inherited the Vane Tempest wealth from her father in 1813. At the

time Lady Frances was a mere thirteen years of age having been born at the start of the century. Naturally the assets on her inheritance were in the hands of a group of trustees and this continued until she married some six years later and beyond.

In 1818 her collieries had an operating profit of £60,000, an immense amount of money at the time. The land on which the collieries stood was leased from the Dean and Chapter of Durham who were at times displeased with the amount of rent being paid and refused to renew the lease in 1814-15. Eventually the difficulties were overcome and the family continued to mine coal.

The Vane-Tempests were members of an ancient and important family, made up of the Tempests of Wynyard, whereas the Vanes a family from Long Newton near to Stockton were responsible for some of the most important

mining developments in County Durham. Sir Piers Tempest fought at Agincourt and the family acquired much of their wealth from the Dissolution of the monasteries. The mother of the Lady Frances Anne was the Countess of Antrim thus there was already an Irish connection prior to her marriage.

The Londonderry fam-



ily, on the other hand, had occupied an important place in the political and commer-

cial life of Britain for more than 100 years. They were also part of the growing European and World political sphere.

The initiator of this political dominance was Alexander Stewart of Ballylawn Castle, County Donegal and Mount Stewart, County Down. His son Robert, born in 1739, continued in the politics of Northern Ireland and came to the fore in 1783 when the Irish Parliament was reformed and started to act on its own, although still guided by the English Parliament. He was made a Baron in 1789, a Viscount (Castlereagh) and an Earl (Londonderry) in 1896. Robert Stewart who eventually became second Marquess of Londonderry was better known as Lord Castlereagh and was second only to Pitt in the English Parliament. **Not only did he support England's** efforts through Wellington in Europe but he coped with

the vast changes taking place on the continent through the actions of Napoleon. He represented England at the Congress of Vienna, the Treaty of Paris and the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, the three great assemblies which determined much of the fortunes of Europe and crushed a great deal of the revolutionary spirit sweeping Europe. He had a general bad temper, lacked intellectual stability and was most unpopular, often because of his manners. From the first to the last he was disliked, even hated and always ready to drive through unpopular political decisions.

In 1821 he succeeded as second Marquess of Londonderry **following his father's** death and in the following year following a period of mental instability committed suicide.

His half brother Charles William Stewart was born on

18th May 1778 and was known as the Honourable Charles Stewart from 1789 until 1813 then Sir Charles Stewart



Robert Stewart, 2nd Marquess of Londonderry , Lord Castlereagh

from 1813 to 1814 then Lord Stewart from 1814 to 1822 whereupon he became the Third Marquess of Londonderry.

Born in Dublin Charles Stewart was educated at Eton and at the age of 16 commissioned as a lieutenant in the Irish Dragoons although he had served two years as an

ensign. He was a small man, barely five feet in height but soon claimed a reputation for having a fighting spirit. He was severely wounded in the Battle of Donnenwerth in 1797 but still managed to go through the Irish insurrection in 1798. In 1800 he was elected to the Irish House of Commons as the Tory representative for Thomastown, County Kildare, then shortly afterwards he exchanged this seat for that of Londonderry County. He was a member of the Irish Parliament until 1801 then represented Londonderry in the English Parliament until 1814. For a short time he engaged as Under Secretary of War in the English Parliament (1807). During this early period of his political career he married for the first time. His first wife was Lady Catherine Bligh, daughter of the third Earl of Darnley and they were married in 1804. She was three years older than Londonderry.

They had one son, Frederick William Stewart. Unfortunately his wife died during the night of the 10th-11th February 1812, after a marriage lasting a mere eight years. At the time Lord Londonderry was fighting, on active service in the Peninsular.

He distinguished himself in the Peninsular Wars under Sir John Moore and from 1809 until 1813 was Adjutant-General to the army under Wellington. This service was to make both Stewart and Wellington firm friends in the years to come. He was recognised as having desperate courage as a cavalry leader and was renowned throughout the army for his bravery.

The years following 1813 were a mixture for him of both political positions and army assignments. In 1813 he went to Berlin as Ambassador and Military Commissioner. This was followed as an ap-

pointment as Ambassador to Austria. In 1815 he fought in the Battle of Waterloo and was with Wellington when he marched into Paris.

In 1819 the British Ambassador, now 40 years of age married for the second time. He married Frances Anne Emily Vane Tempest aged just 19 years a then wealthy heiress. In 1822 he succeeded his half brother as third Marquess of Londonderry and a year later he was created Earl Vane and Viscount Seaham with remainder to his heirs made by his second wife.

There was no doubt that both parties to the marriage got on very well together both in their private lives and in the business relationship together. The fact that he had to change his direction from soldier and politician to business person was one that he grasped with both hands and the pair became formida-

ble partners in the competition for coal.

Much of Frances' coal

business was run by agents appointed by the Court of Chancery as part of the arrangement established by guardians and trustees when she was younger. Known to the **family as "Fighting Charlie"**, prior to his marriage he had never been to County Durham previously. He was not a rich man, having most of his wealth tied up in land and inheritances in Northern Ireland. The lack of ready cash made life difficult for him when his ambitions exceeded his reality. To his credit, however, he brought to the marriage strong connections reaching as high as royalty and an immense ability to influence and direct others including his many friends in high places.

A mere two years after his marriage the Seaham Estate including Dalden, belong-

ing to Sir Ralph Milbanke came up for sale. Sir Ralph at the time was cash strapped having spent large amounts of money on electioneering over two decades as well as building and enlarging Seaham Hall from the early 1790s. The final straw came about in 1815 when it was necessary to provide a dowry of £20,000 for his daughter and only child, Anne Isabella, in her marriage to the poet Lord Byron in January 1815. Sir Ralph and his wife decided to move back to their ancestral home at Halnaby in North Yorkshire leaving Seaham Hall to be the home of the Byrons. Lord Byron, however had other ideas since he found the life at Seaham to be boring and unexciting as well as being out of the mainstream of London and indeed European social life at the time.

Meanwhile, an inheritance passed to Lady Milbanke in April 1815 from her **brother's Wentworth estates**

and this saved her husband from potential bankruptcy. This together with the fact **that that there daughter's** marriage began to fail in 1816 meant that Seaham Hall was surplus to their requirements so it was put up for sale.

The estates came up for sale at Public auction in October 1821 and the bid submitted by Lord Stewart of £63,000 was accepted. He was able to pay for part of it by charging it against his **brother's Irish property.**

This was some months before coal was found under the magnesian limestone at Hetton and it could be that coal lay under the Seaham estates as this was later to prove in the 1850s. Sir Ralph had however come up with a hair-brained idea that a port could be built at Seaham at Dalden Point on the coast. He realised that this could provide for some of the coal now coming from Rainton and potentially Hetton so he went to

the trouble of engaging an **engineer's report provided by** William Chapman who drew up a plan for Port Milbanke. He became afraid of the costs of such a high risk project and decided to retire to his Wentworth Estates in Leicestershire and sold the Seaham estates instead.

There is no question that Lord Stewart knew about this possible venture hence his interest in acquiring the es-



Lady Anne Milbanke

tates. Lord Stewart wished to be free of the middlemen who operated the port

of Sunderland and this would enable him to rid the shackles and be his own master. The trustees who regulated his

wife's inheritance did not have the same ambition for the port idea and for the next seven years ignored **Stewart's wishes to go ahead** with construction in spite of **supporting engineer's plans** and reports.

During the next seven years Londonderry and his wife opened further pits in the Rainton, Pittington and Hetton areas. The original six large pits, namely, **Nicholson's, Rainton Meadows, Plains, Hunter's House, Resolution** and Woodside were all doing well at Rainton and in 1822 a seventh was added when the Adventure was added to the portfolio. There was also a collection of smaller pits in the vicinity of Rainton and they included the Old Engine, the Quarry, Annabella, North and Pontop. In 1826 the Alexandrina or

Lecht Pit opened. Also in the same year a pit was opened at Old Durham and then another at Broomside, marking the westerly limit of the Londonderry empire. In 1828 two pits at Pittington opened, they were the Londonderry Adolphus Pit and the Buddle Pit.

In the early 1820s Londonderry had leased land from the Earl of Strathmore to the east of his Rainton interests. This lay close to further land owned by the Dean and Chapter which was also leased to Londonderry. This land he sub-let to William Russel of Brancepeth who developed the Hazard and Dun Well collieries and they were started in 1825 or possibly a little before this date. On the Strathmore land Moorsley colliery was finally opened in 1838.

Being a shrewd operator Londonderry ensured that all of these collieries connected with his original Penshaw waggonways and later on to the Seaham railway when it opened in 1830. Hazard, Dunwell and Moorsley eventually came under the ownership of the Hetton Coal Company with Londonderry having a share in the company when it formed.

Finally the plans for a port were drawn up after reports had been published by the most famous engineers of the day, namely Rennie and Telford. The whole area had for centuries previous been agricultural and apart from two farms in the area close to Seaham Hall there was no other habitation. Thus not only was it necessary to build a substantial port with harbour facilities but Londonderry also had to provide for a railway to bring the coal to the port and then lay the

foundations of a small town to provide shelter and amenities for the workers and families who would ultimately provide the necessary occupations to enable the port to function.

In 1831 the population of Old Seaham (Seaton with Slingley) some distance inland from the coast was a mere 264, a figure close to the 1821 total. However by 1834 the population probably neared a thousand and then seven years later at the time of the 1841 census the population had grown to 2017. By this time the town and harbour had flourished and the port itself was reaching saturation point with regard to the number of ships using its docks. The 1841 census records a wide range of occupations among the inhabitants and they include, teachers, brewers, joiners, builders, labourers, clerks, dressmakers and shoemakers in addition to a clutch of marine associated occupations such as,

seamen, ropemakers, ship-builders, pilots, chandlers etc. The wealth of the population thus grew as the town and harbour developed.

By 1851 the population had doubled that of a decade before with over 4000 people dwelling in or close to Seaham. The town had grown to the south and along the coast and the Londonderrys took an active interest in its development.

The success and growth of the Harbour was undoubtedly brought about by the construction of the Londonderry railway built during the years 1828 -31. In spite of having insufficient funds to build the railway Londonderry borrowed money to complete the work. He also made an alliance with Colonel Thomas Braddyll the owner of Haswell colliery who also had made plans to build a port at Hawthorn Hive four miles south of Seaham harbour. Braddyll

was given use of a railway extension to Seaham from Haswell in return for the loan of £17,000.

The construction and running of the railway, some five miles, from his Rainton pits was contracted out to save money, to Shakespeare Reed of Thornhill who recouped his money by charging

15P per chaldren for a guaranteed 50,000 chaldrons annually. This was inevitably one of the middlemen that Londonderry could well do without, but it was 1840 before he was able to buy him out and so own the investment.

The first coals ran down the line from Rainton on July 25th 1831 and they were **loaded into the new brig "Lord Seaham" at the docks.**

The railway connected around 18 miles of waggonways from Londonderry pits and further extensions were from non Londonderry pits.

The Londonderrys opened a new Pit at Seaton in 1852 and this completely saturated the port with coal deliveries, and that decade saw an extraordinary growth in population as a further coalmine came on stream to the west of the town and known as Seaham Colliery. This necessitated the building of the Seaham and Sunderland Railway as coal could then be shipped to the newly opened South Docks by 1854. In February 1853 the Marquess dug the first sod of this railway and it was the last public engagement he carried out. The following year, in poor health, he contracted influenza which developed into pneumonia and he died at his London mansion on March 6th 1854. His eldest son from his first marriage then took his titles as the 4th Marquess.

His widow, for 35 years in his shadow then took over the reins. She proved just as

adequate as her late husband. In 1859 she bought Framwellgate colliery and improved the running of the Rainton line and later the same year opened blast furnaces at Nose point near Dawdon. They were only partially successful and were closed a few years later. She also directed the opening of Seaham Colliery at saw it blossom as one of the most profitable in the portfolio. Finally in 1864 a few weeks before her death she bought Seaton Colliery and merged it with Seaham. This was in response to new legislation whereby collieries had to have two shaft outlets for safety reasons following the tragedy at Hartley Colliery, Northumberland

The health of the Dowager Marchioness had declined rapidly after 1862. The news of the death of her second and favourite son Adolphus in June 1864 broke her heart and she suffered a serious heart attack while on holiday



The rear of Seaham Hall as it is today, a modern luxury hotel. Built by Sir Ralf Milbanke in 1791-2 it was sold along with the estate to Lord Londonderry in 1821

in Ulster. She returned to Seaham seriously ill but recovered enough by Christmas. However she had a relapse and died on January 20th 1865, three days after her 65th birthday.

Known and remembered for her many social and welfare exploits which helped large numbers of people struggling for existence during the first part of the nineteenth century she was also a good mother and wife to her family.

She was buried with her

husband at Long Newton surrounded by Vane relations.

The immediate and less well known descendents of the Londonderrys took very little interest in the family empire in the north-east. Their visits were minimal, mainly for shooting parties at Wynyard. By and large the running of the business was left in the hands of agents some of whom lacked business **acumen**. **Frances Anne's heir** Earl Vane (later 5th Marquess) was advised that the days of the Rainton Royalty were limited and by 1866 a slow and gradual abandonment began. The coal depression of the 1890s hastened the end of the Londonderry empire when the railway was closed in 1896 along with four Rainton collieries and most of the few remaining collieries sold off to Lord George Lambton (closed 1978) which lasted along with Silksworth (closed 1971) into Nationalisation.