



From The Rev. James O'Laverty's *An Historical Account of the Diocese of Down and Connor ...*
Dublin, 1880. (Vol.2 – Castlereagh or Upper
Clannaboy from page 180 onwards)

On the death of Sir Con McNeill Oge O'Neill in 1589, Con ... became lord of Upper Clannaboy by right of tanistry. ... The English authorities soon acknowledged the *de facto* lord of Castlereagh. ... Con is also described as the Queen's pensioner. Con continued to hold South Clannaboy until an event, important to himself and to the native Irish occurred, which is thus recorded in the *Montgomery Manuscripts*:—

“The said servants being sent with runletts to bring wine from Belfast aforesaid, unto said Con, their master and great Tierne (Lord), as they called him, then in a great debauch at Castlereagh, with his brother, his friends, and followers; they returning (without wine) to him, battered and bled, explained that the soldiers had taken the wine, with the casks, from them by force. Con enquiring of them into the matter, they confessed their number quite exceeded the soldiers, who indeed had abused them, they being very drunk.

“On this report of the said servants, Con was vehemently moved to anger; reproached them bitterly; and in rage swore by his father, and by all his noble ancestors' souls, that none of them should ever serve him, for he was married and had issue, if they went not back, forthwith and did not revenge the affront done to him and themselves by these Boddagh Sasonagh soldiars, as he termed them. The said servants, as yet more than half drunk, avowed to execute that revenge, and hasted away instantly; arming themselves in the best way they could, in that short time, and engaged the same soldiers, from words to blows, assaulting them with their weapons; and in the scuffle, for it was no ordinary fight, one of the soldiers happened to receive a wound, of which he died that night, and some other slashes were given; but the Teagues* were beaten off and chased, some sore wounded and others killed; only the best runners got Scott free.

“The pursuit was not far, because the soldiers feared a second assault from the hill of Castlereagh, where the said Con, with his two brothers, friends, and followers, for want of more *dorgh***, stood beholders of the chase. Then in a week next after this fray, an office of enquest was held on Con, and those of his said friends and followers, and also on the servants, and on all that were suspected of being procurers, advisers, or actors therein, and all whom the Provost Marshall could seize were taken, by which office the said Con, with some of his friends, were found guilty of levying war against the Queen. This mischief happened a few months before her death.”

* *Teague* was then used as a contemptuous name for an Irishman, as Paddy is now.

** *Dorgh*, drink, the whole expression is *Deoch an doruis* — the drink of the door — the parting cup.

After the accession of James to the throne, Con found his gaolers less severe, he “had liberty to walk at his pleasure, in the day time, in the streets of Carrickfergus, and to entertain his friends and tenants in any victualling house within the towne, having only a single sentinel to keep him in custody, and every night to deliver him to the Marshall.”

Hugh Montgomery, the Laird of Braidstane, in Ayrshire, having learned the story of Con, determined to turn it to his own advantage; he employed the owner of a vessel which traded to Carrickfergus, one Thomas Montgomery, to carry off Con to Braidstane. “Thomas aforesaid (as the Laird had formerly advised), having made love to the town marshall’s daughter, called Annas Dobbin, and had gained her’s and parents’ consents to be wedded together. This took umbrages of suspicion away, and so by contrivance of his espoused an opportunity one night was given to the said Thomas and his barque’s crew, to take on board the said Con as it were by force.” Hugh Montgomery now undertook to obtain for Con a free pardon, on condition that he should obtain the half of Con’s land. When, however, Montgomery and Con arrived in London, they found such a thirst for the lands of Irishmen among the greedy Scotch courtiers of the new King, that they were necessitated to enter into new arrangements with one of these, James Hamilton, by which all Con’s estates were to be divided among the three in equal shares.

Hamilton acquired his influence with the King, because he and Sir James Fullarton had long resided in Dublin, in the latter end of the reign of Elizabeth, under pretence of teaching a school in Ship Street, but in reality for the purpose of conveying letters, from some great lords in London to King James, and conveying his letters back to them; for that way was considered more safe than the northern road. The King granted to James Hamilton all the lands in the territories of Upper Clondeboy, the Great Ards, and Kilultagh; with power to hold markets and fairs at Castlereagh, Bangor, Holywood, and other places; with power to grant or demise these lands to any English or Scotch person, but not to “mere Irishmen,” Con O’Neill and his heirs only being excepted. After this grant, Hamilton made grants of their respective shares to Montgomery and Con O’Neill. To the latter was given the demesne lands of Castlereagh, and he was carefully excluded from the sea coast, that the lands along it might be occupied by Scotchmen. Con parted with his vast territory, townland by townland, to various parties.

Among the most fortunate of purchasers from Con O’Neill was Sir Moyses Hill, who thus acquired what forms the Castlereagh estate of the Marquis of Downshire. The vast possessions, so easily acquired, formed the fruitful cause of many a dispute between Montgomery and Hamilton. Various inquiries were held, and the Earl of Abercorn appointed arbitrator; but Hamilton so hated Montgomery, that in his will, drawn up by his own hand, 16th December, 1616, he directed, upon his blessing, that none of his sons or daughters should match or marry with any son or daughter of the house or posterity of Sir Hugh Montgomery. Sir James obtained, for his share of the plunder, the entire parishes of Ballyhalbert, Bangor, Dundonnell, Craigavad, and Holywood; and he purchased the Barony of Dufferin from the White family. He was created Viscount Clondeboye, 4th March, 1622; and he died 24th January, 1643-4, aged eighty-four years. His son James, created Earl of Clanbrassil in 1647, inherited all his estates, and died June 20th, 1659. Henry, the son and successor of Earl, James, married Lady Alice Moore, daughter of Henry Earl of Drogheda.

Their only son died an infant, and the only surviving brother of her husband having died about the same time, she prevailed upon the Earl of Clanbrassil to make a will, leaving all his

estates, absolutely, to herself. The Earl died, January 12th, 1675, suddenly, not without the suspicion of foul play. On his death the titles of Clandeboye and Clanbrassil became extinct, and the Countess assumed ownership of the estates, which she eventually in 1676 settled on her brothers. In the mean time five cousins of the late Earl, viz. :— James Hamilton, of Newcastle in the Ards, afterwards named of Bangor; Sir Hans Hamilton, of Hamiltonsbawn, County Armagh; James Hamilton, of Neilsbrooke; Archibald Hamilton and Patrick Hamilton, representatives of the first Viscount's five brothers, instituted lawsuits to recover the estates. They agreed to pursue the suit, at their joint expense, and then to divide the estate into five equal shares.

James of Newcastle, and Sir Hans, however, though they were entrusted by the others, contrived to purchase for themselves, on the 18th of February, 1679, from Henry Moore, his interest in the lands for £2,400, and they also purchased other incumbrances created by the Countess.

The other cousins were consequently outwitted, and they obtained each only the one-fifth share of the lands in Dufferin, &c, which had been settled on the widow of the second Viscount and first Earl. In consequence of the expensive litigation and the failure of male representatives, the part of Con O'Neill's territory, which Sir James obtained, has passed from the name of Hamilton, though a portion of Dufferin, which he acquired from the Whites, is still in the possession of the Hamiltons, of Killileagh Castle. The part of the Hamilton estates which passed to James Hamilton, of Newcastle and afterwards of Bangor, is mostly still in the possession of his descendants, Lord Bangor, Mr. Ward, of Bangor, and Mr. Price, of Saintfield; Lord Dufferin inherits what remains of the share of James Hamilton of Neilsbrook: but what fell to the share of Sir Hans Hamilton; the lands of Ballywalter, Holywood, and his share of the manor of Killileagh, together with lands elsewhere, were sold in 1703, in consequence of a private Act of Parliament passed in the previous year.

Sir Hugh Montgomery obtained, for his share of the territories belonging to *Con O'Neill, what now forms the Londonderry estate and those of Mr. Delacherois, Mr. Cromelin, and Mr. Montgomery, of Grey Abbey, together with several other extensive tracts that have been transferred to sundry individuals, from time to time, by his representatives. Sir Hugh was created Viscount Montgomery, of the Great Ards; his grandson, Hugh, the third Viscount, was created in 1661, Earl of Mount-Alexander.

Hugh, the second Earl, sold in 1675, to Robert Colvil, of Mount-Colvil, in the County of Antrim, the manor of Newtownards for £10,640, and the Temple Crone estate for £3,000; and in 1679 he sold to the same person for £9,780 the manor of Mount-Alexander otherwise Comber, reserving out of it the manor-house and demesne of Mount-Alexander.

*Con O'Neill is supposed to have died about the year 1618, at Holywood; and he is said to have been buried in the ancient graveyard of Ballymaghan (*Hill's Montgom. MSS*).

These estates were sold by the Colvil family to Mr. Alexander Stewart, the ancestor of Lord Londonderry, the present proprietor. Mount-Alexander and the remnant of the Montgomery estates were bequeathed by Henry Montgomery, last Earl of Mount-Alexander, who died in 1757, to his Countess; and by her they were bequeathed to her nephews, Samuel Delacherois and Nicholas Cromelin, whose representatives still enjoy them, except Mount-Alexander, which was purchased by the Londonderry family. Thus the vast estates, for which Montgomery and Hamilton plotted in such wily ways, passed off from their respective families as bequests to the childless widows of their last representatives, and no descendant of either of them possesses any of their property; for the Hamiltons of Killileagh and the Montgomeries of Grey Abbey only represent families collateral with Sir James and Sir Hugh.