

# William Sharman-Crawford on himself ...

This “brief autobiography of William Sharman-Crawford, dated c.1844” comes courtesy of the following website where it may be read in context:

<http://lawnbowls.com/gyconrl/files/24.htm>

I was born 3rd Sept., 1780 at Moira Castle ... which had been rented from the old Earl Moira. My father had removed from Lisburn ... My sister had been born seven years before me (1773). My father had married Miss Willson of Purdysburn in 1772 – and the only other issue was a brother called John Hill ~ born in 1790 who died about the age of 20 of consumption.

My father’s father, John Sharman lived in Grange, Co. Antrim, on a freehold property since converted into a fee farm, My father inherited his properties in the Counties of Down and Meath from his Uncle Capt. Wm. Sharman who married the granddaughter of the last Lord O’Neill. My grandfather married a Miss Young of Co. Tyrone by whom he had issue, my father and another son, who died young, called Richard and 3 or 4 daughters.

My father had been for several years Collector of Revenue in the Lisburn District ... Up to the year 1783 he had not taken any prominent part ... in politics. In 1783 he was asked by the Liberal interest in Lisburn to stand ... against the nominees of the Marquis of Hertford. He carried ... the election against that interest ... It was a remarkable thing that the Liberal interest should select a placeholder ... He honestly kept his pledges and at the termination of the session it was intimated to him by the Government that his services were no longer required ...

At this period there was a great political excitement in the North of Ireland. The most extraordinary body the Irish Volunteers were then in their full glory ... My father was Lieut. Col. of the Union Regiment ... My father took a leading part in all the proceedings of the Volunteers – their meetings and conventions ... He retired from Parliament in the year 1790. During that period a continual struggle had been going on by the Independent members backed by the Volunteers in the several localities to obtain those points of reform in the representation which are still contended for in England ... Shortly after this a new class of Volunteers got up called the United Irishmen whereupon the old Volunteers broke up ... in or about the year 1792 ... The main cause of the failure of the Volunteers in their patriotic efforts was the disunion caused by the Catholic disabilities ... some were for immediate liberation ... others were afraid of so sudden a change ... and the Government fermented this disunion. It was in consequence of this disunion that the United Irishmen were formed ... The French revolution occurred at this time and the Polish Revolt and the United Irishmen took up the support of both these events ... This was one of the causes which, when England took part with the allies against France, placed the United Irishmen under the unpretation [? accusation?] of disloyalty. From this time (1792 or 93) the organisation began to assume a private and illegal character and ultimately ended in ... the rebellion in 1798.

I spent my infantile years at Moira Castle but every year spending the winter in Dublin during the Parliamentary session and notwithstanding my early years I took interest in all the great political questions on which I would hear him enlarging ...

I being for so long an only son was thought a Jewel of great price. I was inclined as a child to delicacy of health – at least it was thought so by my parents – and I was kept under the most annoying superintendence ... I was drugged with medicines ... I was made what you would call a

crock and a pet ... It was alleged I would soon die if I went to school and my Father had an abhorrence of tutors, so my father determined to teach me to read and write ... arithmetic ... Latin ... and some Greek ... I instructed myself in history ... mathematics, mechanics, geography and astronomy, etc. I was exceedingly anxious to have gone to college, but this was prohibited (for health reasons) and ... lest my morals should be corrupted ... [In 1799] my father got a paralytic stoke ... the consequence of which was that the money affairs and all the concerns of the establishments devolved upon me. My Father got somewhat better but ... died in 1803 ...

In 1805 I married Mabel F. Crawford of Crawfordsburn. Shortly after, I left Moira Castle ... the place and estate having been purchased by Mr. Bateson. Shortly before 1790 a new element of separation between Catholics and Protestants began ... in the formation of the Orange Lodges ... at first weak and poor ... but gradually acquired strength ... being sustained by the government as a counter-acting power against the United Irishmen who in the North of Ireland were undoubtedly Protestants of the Presbyterian Church ... The two communities of Protestants and Catholics became completely separated and hostile. The Yeomanry military organisation commenced under the support of the government and the members were ... almost entirely Orangemen. ... The (old) Volunteers were self-armed and clothed, officered by the Gentry holding no commissions from the crown. The Yeomanry were clothed and armed and paid when on duty by the state ... and they were completely liable to all the rules of military discipline ... their officers held commissions from the Government. I joined them as Captain of the Moira Corps in the year 1803 ... From this time the Yeomanry ceased to bear the character of a mere party force and were generally extended over Ireland as a National defensive force.

I did not for many years take any prominent part in politics ... but when the agitation for the relief of the Roman Catholics from their disabilities assumed an active form I joined the ranks of those who contended for the removal of these oppressive laws ... After this period my opinions became more publicly known by attendance at public meetings. The Tithe question was much debated and I took part in favour of their abolition. I also gave a qualified support to O'Connell on the Repeal Question, contending for an Irish local Legislative with powers for local purposes only.

In consequence of my support of Catholic Emancipation and the abolition or new appropriation of the Tithes, I was called on to represent Dundalk ... previous to that I was called on in 1831 to represent the County of Down. I stood a contest for that County – was unsuccessful and again I was called on in 1832 to represent Belfast – was again unsuccessful. The electors of Dundalk returned me ... for which Borough I sat in Parliament till the death of William IV ... I then ceased to represent Dundalk in consequence of my having disagreed from O'Connell on the subject of the Tithe Bill ... I contended for the absolute abolition or total new appropriation and he supported the Whigs in the modified bill which was afterwards passed ... In 1841 I was elected member for Rochdale ... I was returned standing a contest, the Electors paying all expenses ... and I, an Irish landlord, was elected for the special purpose of contending for free trade in corn. I also declared myself the supporter of ... all the essential points contended for at that day under the denomination of Radical reforms ... I also contended for the 9 hour bill against the opinions of the Liberal Mill owners in Parliament and some of my leading Constituents: that measure was carried. ... An English Representative, I did not give up my advocacy of the Irish tenant rights question which I had first raised in Parliament in 1835 (see my various speeches).