

A history of Donore House in County Kildare

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Introduction

Donore House, built in the late 18th century, had all but vanished by the late 20th century. Mortgaged many times over in its early years, “the survival of Donore House as a great mansion house was in danger from its very beginning” (Boylan & Dempsey 1998-9). Donore House had been preceded by Donore Castle, a nearby seat of the FitzGerald family, including Gerald FitzGerald who famously escaped from the Castle following the Silken Thomas rebellion in 1534 and who went on to become the 11th earl of Kildare.

In compiling this brief account I wish to acknowledge the work of Lena Boylan and Michael Dempsey whose article *Donore near Carragh in the Barony of Clane*, published in the *Journal of the Kildare Archeological Society*, 1998-9, Vol XVIII, Part IV, was of invaluable help. Tom Tierney's *Our Family History*, published privately in 2002, provides fascinating information about events concerning Donore House in the late 19th century.

Donore House

The mansion known as Donore House was built in the late 18th century when the Hussey family, then in possession of Donore estate, decided to leave Donore Castle. The roots of the Hussey family lay in Mulhussey, Co Meath. Walter Hussey, from Mulhussey, had bought Donore in 1690.

Donore Castle seems to have been in a poor state of repair at the time. The Deeds note that Donore estate included ‘one Castle with a Demolished Hall adjoining.’

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that more than half a century later Walter's son Edward built a new residence. Edward and his son John financed the building of Donore House through a £6,000 mortgage from Edward Costello of Dublin. Edward and John had taken over the estate from Edward's sister in law Elizabeth Burgh.

Elizabeth, from Naas, had been left a widow after only three years of marriage to Ignatius Hussey, a barrister. They had a son, Walter (a grandson of the Walter Hussey who had bought Donore), who would later make a stir in the world. Following the death of her husband, Elizabeth went to live in Dublin, taking her son with her.

But it was not long before Elizabeth and her son returned to Donore. In 1753 she redeemed the mortgage taken out by Edward and John and took possession of Donore and the estate. The estate included lands in Donore, Oldtown, Newtown and Landenstown.

Elizabeth's son Walter, born at Donore in 1742, was among the most famous men of his day. He added Burgh to his name when he inherited half the property of Elizabeth's cousin Richard Burgh of Dromkeen, Co Limerick in 1762. Thereafter he was referred to generally as ‘Hussey Burgh.’

He was as well known as Henry Grattan and fought hard and brilliantly in the Irish Parliament for free trade for Ireland, a fight in which he, Grattan and the Patriot Party achieved some success. The philosopher, orator and statesman Edmund Burke stated that "Clearness of intellect, a

subtle, refined, and polished wit, a gay, fertile, uncommonly fine imagination, very classical taste, superior harmony, and elegance of diction, peculiarly characterised this justly celebrated man."

Burke noted that his support for independence for the Irish Parliament led Hussey Burgh to give up the post of Prime Serjeant, and the income that went with it.

Hussey Burgh, who was a judge for about a year before his death "loved fame, he enjoyed the blaze of his own reputation," Burke wrote in the Annual Register for 1811.

He was Chief Baron of the Exchequer when he died at the age of 41. His wife Anne Burgh from Athy had died the previous year. They had five children. His early death and his extravagance left his children so poorly provided for that Henry Grattan had to seek a grant from Parliament to support them.

As mentioned above, Walter's mother Elizabeth had returned to Donore in 1753. But she borrowed £4,500 in 1757 from Doctor Barnard, lord bishop of Derry by way of a mortgage.

Mortgage payments were not kept up. Rev John Burgh, who had taken over Donore from his father Walter, was sued in 1796 for the arrears and the Court of Exchequer ordered the sale of the Donore land and of six acres in Landenstown. John Burgh's brother in law, Buchnell McCarthy, bought the estate in 1800 in what was clearly an attempt to save Donore for the Burghs. He purchased the estate for £14,150 and, after the mortgage was paid, £8,387 remained which he gave to Rev John Burgh.

But the attempt to keep Donore in the Burgh family faltered. Ten years later, Rev John Burgh leased the mansion and estate to Philip Roche of Limerick City for £2,500 and a yearly rent of £500. The Burghs went to live at Dromkeen House in Pallasgreen, Co Limerick. This was "a humble residence compared to the mansion house of Donore and reflected the reduced circumstances of the family" (Boylan & Dempsey 1998-9).

The Roches stayed for twenty years but in 1830 John Roche – son of the now-deceased Philip Roche – surrendered the lease to Walter Hussey Burgh of Dromkeen House. John Roche was still a minor when his father died and was more interested in a career in the Light Guards than in running Donore. Walter was Rev John Burgh's eldest son.

Hussey Burgh was High Sheriff of Kildare in 1839 and was a Justice of the Peace. His wife was Elizabeth Jane Fitzgerald of Shepperton, Co Clare.

In all, Hussey Burgh had 2,785 acres of land in Donore, Newtown Donore and Oldtown Donore. The lands attached to Donore House itself comprised 257 acres.

By 1850 the Burghs had left the house again and the mansion was vacant in that year. Later, Burghs let the house and the demesne lands to Thomas Jackson who sublet it to the Rev Elis Archer and Rev Mr Gilmore.

Edward Morrin of Rathangan became a tenant of 218 acres and a herd's house in Oldtown Donore in 1861. Three years later he became a tenant of the mansion and its 257 acre demesne. Mr James Kelly took over the Burghs' interest in Donore in 1874 and thereby became landlord of the Morrins. In 1911, Mrs Maria Morrin purchased the property from Mr Edward R Kelly under the Land Act Purchase.

In *Our Family History* (2002), Tom Tierney of the Cockbridge takes up the story of the Morrins in Donore. Edward Morrin's son Peter became the owner of Donore on his father's death in 1892. Another son, Patrick, married Maria Flood who lived on the adjoining farm in Donore. Family tradition suggests that the Morrin family disapproved of the marriage and that Patrick Morrin's belongings were put into a trunk and thrown out through a window at him. They lived in Bracknagh and later in Millgrove, Rathangan where they opened a shop. Family tradition also suggests that Patrick owned a public house in Portarlinton and that this venture was unsuccessful.

In any event, Peter Morrin, owner of Donore died in October 1897, a few months after Patrick Morrin. He left the assets to charity. Patrick Morrin's widow Maria and her sister in law Margaret joined forces to challenge the will. They succeeded. Maria and her children became owners of Donore and Margaret received a sum of £400. Maria, whose marriage to Patrick Morrin had been so disapproved of, had kept the trunk in which her husband's possessions had been thrown out of a window at Donore and showed it to her grandchildren years later (Tierney 2002).

The Morrins remained in the house until the late 1950s when Leo Morrin built a new dwelling nearby. By now, Donore House was no longer fit for living in. At this stage the Morrin lands in Donore comprised 434 acres. Mondello car-racing track was later built on part of this land.

Donore Castle

Donore Castle came to prominence following the Silken Thomas rebellion of 1534. The FitzGerald's paid a heavy price for the rebellion and Silken Thomas' five uncles were executed. However his half-brother, Gerald FitzGerald, only nine years old and suffering from smallpox, escaped from Donore with the help of his teacher Thomas Leverous, a priest, and did not return for more than a decade.

Henry VIII died in 1547 and two years later his successor Edward VI pardoned all who had helped Lord Gerald (later known as the Wizard Earl) escape from Donore and restored him to his estates. Boylan and Dempsey (1998-9) note that the lands which had been seized from Lord Gerald, had been listed at an inquisition in Dublin in 1536, as:

Donowre, 100 acres.

Keroaghe, 80 acres.

le Newton, 80 acres called ffitzherres landes.

Kylatricke, 14 acres.

Gyngeriston, 13 acres of which Gerald Welesley, lord of Deyngyn, receives the head-rent.

Kyllmagarroke, 40 acres.

Loveston or Lowestown, 15 acres.

Corkraneston.

Leveteston & Ballyscolloke – the head-rents of.

The Donore FitzGerald's are believed to have been descended from Thomas, the fourth son of Maurice who was the fourth earl of Kildare.

Lord Gerald's fortunes improved in 1553 when Queen Mary restored his titles earl of Kildare and baron of Offaly. However he and his wife Mabel Brown (whom he married in 1554) seem to have spent little if any time in Donore, living mainly in Rathangan.

Relatively little is known about the inhabitants of Donore Castle between Lord Gerald's time and the 1630s. A William FitzGerald who died in 1612 and a Garret FitzGerald (who was proposing to mortgage Donore in 1625) seem, from records, to have lived there in the intervening period.

In 1633, Thomas Wentworth, earl of Stafford, was appointed lord deputy of Ireland by Charles I. He set about acquiring land in various parts of Kildare to make up what he called the 'Manor of Elsmore.' Among his purchases were Donore, Oldtown Donore, Newtown Donore and six acres in Landenstown. These lands and the castle had been owned by William FitzGerald. He also bought lands in Caragh, Yeomanstown, Gingerstown and Halverstown. In all, his 'Manor of Elsmore' comprised 5,000 acres in Kildare. The Kildare land cost £4 per acre. The Manor comprised only a minor proportion of all the lands acquired by Wentworth in Kildare and Wicklow.

He may have been wealthy and powerful but his ruthlessness made him many enemies. He neglected to make allies in Ireland and eventually he was successfully accused of treason and executed in 1641. Irish MPs, such as Maurice FitzGerald for Kildare, played a major part in his downfall. His most visible local monument today is the ruins of Jigginstown Castle outside Naas.

Though Wentworth's estates were forfeit to the Crown they were immediately re-granted to his eldest son Charles Watson Wentworth, marquis of Rockingham, so the Wentworths remained in possession of Donore.

In 1690, Walter Hussey bought Donore, including Oldtown and Newtown as well as the castle, from the trustees of William, the late earl of Stafford and from Hon. Thomas Wentworth. He was also to pay a yearly rent of £219.0s.7¼d 'With Covenant of Perpetual Renewal.'

As mentioned in the earlier section, the Husseys subsequently built Donore House and the castle was abandoned and fell into ruin.

Boylan and Dempsey noted in 1998-9 that "A mound in the grounds of Mondello car-racing track is all that remains of the site of the ancient castle of Donore in the Parish of Carragh."

Sources

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