

# **"The Congress of Vienna"**

## **Frances Bailey 12th December 2017**

The final meeting of the Society for 2017 the speaker was Dr Frances Bailey from the National Trust who gave a very interesting talk entitled 'The Congress of Vienna'. This was a meeting of all the states involved in the war against Napoleon and was set up in 1814 following the defeat of the French emperor at the Battle of Leipzig the previous year. Its aim was to agree on a post war settlement for Europe and to ensure a lasting peace on the continent.

One of the organisers of the congress was the British foreign secretary, Robert Stewart, Lord Castlereagh and later second Marquis of Londonderry. In her talk Dr Bailey spoke about the congress and what it achieved. She also looked at the links between the congress and Mount Stewart, Lord Castlereagh's family home on the Ards Peninsula.

The congress began in Vienna in September 1814 and lasted nine months. The main people were the Emperor of Russia, the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia. Lord Castlereagh represented Great Britain. The aim of the congress was to bring lasting peace to Europe. It also aimed to restore all the crowned heads who had been deposed by Napoleon, to restore the boundaries of the countries to what had been before the war broke out and to repatriate all prisoners. Britain also wanted the freedom of the seas for all countries and wanted no single power to dominate Europe. There was a lot to be done!

Lord Castlereagh brought his half-brother Charles with him. As well as being a soldier Charles was also a diplomat. He took the role of a British ambassador and was a great support to his older brother at the different meetings which took place in Vienna. There was never one large meeting where all the European leaders met but a series of smaller ones going on all over the city. Lord Castlereagh was glad of Charles help.

As well as the political leaders there were large numbers of supporting staff. These included secretaries, messengers, researchers and even spies. There was also lots of different entertainments taking place in Vienna. There were festivals and balls at the imperial palace. In January 1815 all the foreign delegates had the opportunity to ride on the frozen lakes using many elaborately decorated sleighs.

In February 1815 Castlereagh was recalled to London as he was thought to be too pro Russia, supporting the Tsar in most of his demands. The congress was interrupted when Napoleon escaped from Elba but resumed following the French Emperor's defeat at Waterloo. As a result of the congress ands conquered by Napoleon were all reallocated in such a way that no one country came to dominate Europe. The kingdom of the Netherlands was created, Poland was divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria, Russia got Finland from Sweden, Britain got Malta, Ceylon and other colonies and free navigation of international rivers was established.

Mount Stewart House has many links with Lord Castlereagh and the Congress. There is a painting of his lordship as a Knight of the Garter, there are a number of honours he was awarded for his role in the congress., a desk which he used while in Vienna and two candelabra presented to him by Pope Pius VII in gratitude for restoring to the papacy lands taken by Napoleon. Perhaps most noticeable items associated with the Congress of Vienna are the chairs used by those who took part in the event. The chairs are now embroidered with the coats of arms of each of the participants and are an important reminder of the role Lord Castlereagh played in the congress and its links with Mount Stewart.