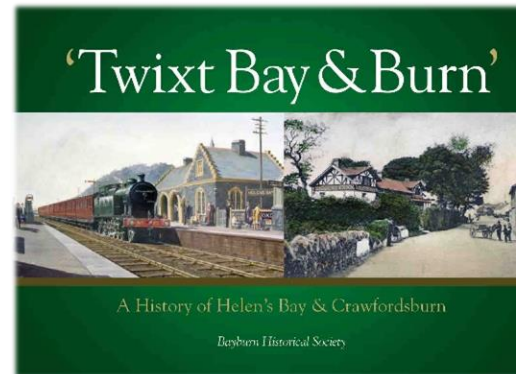


Helen's Bay and Crawfordsburn – Robin Masefield

11th December 2019

Robin Masefield a founder member of the Bayburn Historical Society gave a lively and animated talk that covered much of the history of Helen's Bay and Crawfordsburn as well providing many lesser known facts and stories about the area, characters and events. Over more than 20 years he with others collected as much historical material as was practicable as well as recording oral histories some of which stretch back to Victorian times. The result was 'Twixt Bay and Burn' a book published in 2011, 1500 copies were printed selling at £10 each, all sold and today the book can only be obtained second hand at prices approaching £40.



Mesolithic flint tools circa 6000BC provide evidence of settlements from early times, however recorded history began with the arrival of James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery in the early 1600s. After imprisoning Con O'Neill, they then negotiated his release by each taking a third of his lands and bringing settlers from England and Scotland. James Hamilton was to become the first Viscount Claneboye commissioning Thomas Raven to map his property. The first reference to what was to become Crawfordsburn was on a 1625 Raven map which referred to Andrew Craford a Scottish settler.

William Sharman of Moira Castle married Mabel Crawford the only daughter of John Crawford who sanctioned the marriage on condition that Sharman changed his surname to Sharman Crawford. For more than 150 years the Sharman Crawfords were the major owners of land and property in the immediate area.

An 18th report by a prospective agent for a local landlord in Helen's Bay stated 'I never saw so poor a corn country from which the people are constantly flitting', the development of Helen's Bay is entirely due to the foresight of Frederick Blackwood the 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava. Whilst he had several grandiose plans that he was unable to fund he did bring the railway station. Benjamin Ferrey the architect designed an ornate station built in Scottish Gothic style most of which remains unchanged today. One side was for use by the general public, the other side was lavishly furnished and was used exclusively by the Dufferin family and their guests.

An unexpected enquiry from America seeking information about James and Sara McDonald of Crawfordsburn led to the discovery that in 1841/42 the village was visited by Mormon Evangelists and James, Sara and their 10 children converted. They were poor, living in a small house, he as a tenant farmer with about half an acre. They left for America and after a lengthy and arduous sea journey to New Orleans they boarded a ship to take them up the Mississippi to a Mormon settlement at Nauvoo. Mormons were not popular with many settlers and at times they were hostile, stoning them and denying the ship a berth or supplies. To earn more money the father and 2 sons contracted themselves to a farmer further upstream, without prior knowledge they had arrived at a plantation where for 18 months they lived in huts alongside slaves where they were accepted by the colony. James had brought his fiddle and at times would accompany the slaves as they sang their spiritual songs, sometimes they would be invited into the plantation owner's house to sing. On the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, Brigham Young instructed the colony to move further west, unfortunately when crossing a river James contracted dysentery and died, his family eventually made it to Salt Lake City where they settled permanently.