

“Frederick Blackwood of Clandeboye”. **Norman Weatheral 10th October 2018**

A most prominent member of Victorian society, brilliant diplomat, adventurer, explorer, author of a book still in print, sportsman, Governor-General of Canada, Viceroy of India. These are just some of the positions of high office and achievement attained by the man who became Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava. (Ava being a Province in Burma).

Born in Florence in 1826, his father Captain Price Blackwood was descended from Scottish stock and prominent landowners in County Down. His mother, Helen Selina Sheridan was the granddaughter of Richard Sheridan the playwright. His father being at sea did not see much of his son and Frederick's life was very much influenced by his mother with whom he had a lifelong bond. During 1841 his father tragically died from an accidental overdose of morphine whilst on board the Steam Packet from Liverpool.

At 15 he succeeded his father, inheriting his estate and taking the title 5th Baron Dufferin and Claneboye, changing the name to Clandeboye on coming of age in 1847. Educated at Eaton and Oxford he left without obtaining a degree. The privileges that he was entitled to at Oxford, such as keeping servants and horses rankled with him and throughout his life he was in conflict with concern for others versus his own position. In 1847 he travelled to Skibbereen to witness the worst of the famine resulting in him writing a journal and establishing a famine fund to which he contributed £1000. He was appointed a Lord-in-Waiting to Queen Victoria.

He dreamt of building a much grander house at Grey's Point. Money was always short so over time he had additions built around the existing house using the services of W.H. Lynn the noted Belfast architect. Throughout his diplomatic life he collected items from those countries where he served, hence Canadian curling stones, Indian tiger skins and Egyptian artefacts that can be seen in today's house. He built Helen's Tower* naming it after his mother.

In 1856 aboard the schooner '*Foam*' he undertook a journey around the North Atlantic, on returning he wrote '*Letters From High Latitudes*' that was both informative and witty, the letters were to his mother and the book remains in print to this day.

By 1860 as British special commissioner to Syria he implemented British policy involving Turkish, Persian and Prussian interests and the removal of a French occupying force. Success in Syria led to rapid advancement and in 1864 he became Under-Secretary of State for India, followed by Under-Secretary of War then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

In 1862 when 37, Frederick married Harriot Rowan-Hamilton of Killyleagh Castle. She was 19 the marriage was successful; there were 7 children 2 being born in Canada. Harriot adapted easily to diplomatic life and was a great asset to Frederick. She also undertook initiatives in her own right, notably the improvement of women's medical care in India where she established '*Lady Dufferin*' clinics, hospitals and dispensaries that still bear her name.

1872 -1888, he was made Governor General of Canada at a time when the country was undergoing rapid change. He travelled widely and was the first Governor to undertake coast to coast visits. He greatly extended and enhanced Government House, Ottawa, engaging the services of W.H. Lynn. He was actively involved in sports, especially shooting, fishing, curling, tennis and lacrosse.**

Further postings were British ambassador to Imperial Russia, Turkey, British commissioner to Egypt and in 1884 British Viceroy of India where he saw the annexation of Burma. As in Canada he lavishly extended and added to the Government buildings in Simla. 1888-1891 British ambassador to Italy then British ambassador to France which was his last posting.

He lived beyond his means and in the expectation of adding to his income he was offered the role of chairman of the London and Globe Finance Corporation, owned by a Whitaker Wright. Wright was a fraudster, in 1900 the shares collapsed, the company was declared insolvent. Frederick lost a lot of money, a subsequent investigation found him not guilty of deception. Wright had been manipulating the accounts and was sentenced but committed suicide by taking cyanide.

Further tragedy was to follow when his eldest son Archibald was killed during the Boer War. Frederick returned to Clondeboye in poor health and died on the 12th of February 1902. A monument was erected to his memory during 1906 and sits outside Belfast City Hall.

**Ulster Tower, a war memorial at Thiepval, France was modelled on Helen's Tower. Soldiers of the 36th Ulster Division trained at Clondeboye before being sent to fight at the Battle of the Somme.*

***Ards Lacrosse Club was the first Lacrosse club to be formed in Ireland in 1872. Canadian teams visited and Irish teams went to Canada. Ards won both major trophies; the Irish Championship Flag and the Irish Challenge Shield. They were unbeaten over 3 seasons and retained the trophies that are kept by Ards and North Down Borough Council.*



Frederick Blackwood Memorial
1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava
Belfast City Hall