

# Hillsborough Castle Demesne

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By the late nineteenth century the Hill family, who had attained the title Marquess of Downshire, among many other noble titles, were one of the largest landowners in Ireland with over 120,000 acres, of which around 70,000 were in County Down. The Hills were descended from Moyses Hill (c.1550-1630), a landless young gentleman from the West Country who came to Ireland in 1573 with Walter Devereux, first Earl of Essex, during the reign of Elizabeth. Moyses fought in various campaigns against the O'Neills, rising through the ranks to become Provost Marshall of Carrickfergus Castle and then Provost Marshall for Ulster (1617), in addition to being elected MP (1613) for Co. Antrim. For his services, he had been granted extensive estates in Ulster and had a number of residences, but it seems his main one was Hill Hall (Kinmuck), a strong house outside Lisburn, where he died in 1630, aged seventy-six. Among the lands that he purchased in County Down were eleven townlands from Brian Oge Magennis in the lordship of Kilwarlin in 1611, lands that included the former medieval settlement of Crumlin or Cromlyn, later Hillsborough.

## The Foundation of Hillsborough

While the Small Park of Hillsborough Castle is essentially an 18<sup>th</sup> century creation, its history goes back to medieval times, for this area, known as Crumlin or Cromlyn (crooked glen) was the focus of the early settlement, with an ancient church and the original Magennis family residence of the Kilwarlin lordship.

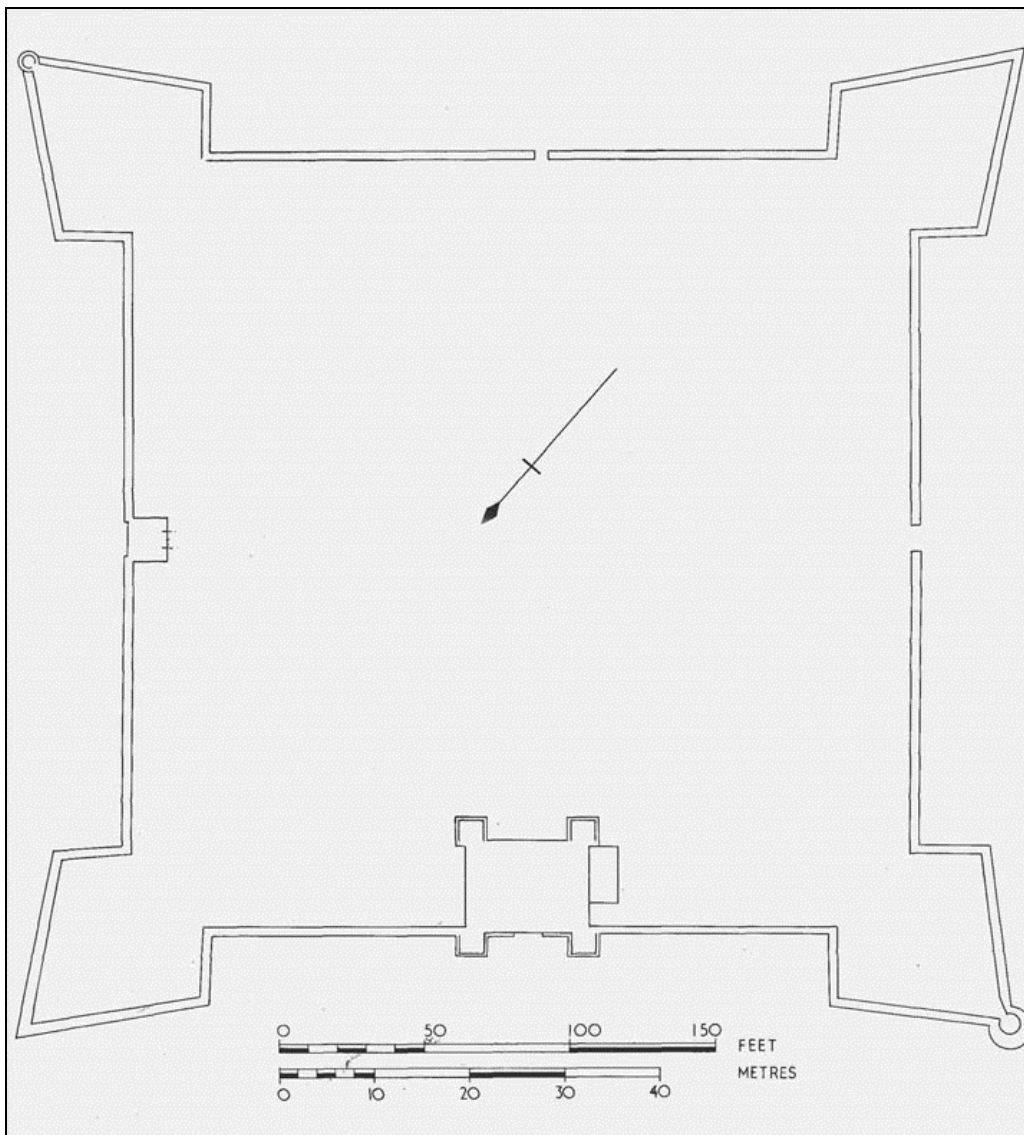
The earliest reference to the church at Crumlin is from the 1306 *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* of Pope Nicholas IV where according to Reeves it can be identified as the chapel of Drumboe church, near Lisburn. It is shown on early maps to have been located at the north end of what is now the lime avenue, about fifty yards north-east-north of the north-east walled garden corner. It remained functioning as a church (St Malachi's) until 1662 when Arthur Hill built a new church on a different site; this was later replaced by the present Gothick church in the 1770s. The old church, noted as a ruin by Harris in 1744 and still marked on the 1778 demesne map, appears to have been cleared around the beginning of the 19th century. Stones from the site were moved to create a megalithic folly just outside the east wall of the walled garden; in time this site became mistaken for the original church site.

The principal Magennis residences in their lordship of Kilwarlin were based here at Hillsborough. One of these appears to have been a crannog on the lake of the Small Park; this lake was adapted as a mill pond in the early 18th century and by the 1750s was being transformed into the present ornamental water. Fox Fort in the Great Park, formerly in Edenticullo townland, may also have been one of their centres.

These Kilwarlin Magennisses were one of a series of Irish clans who dominated the area of what is now County Down from the 12th century. Most of the various clans survived until the 16th century when they found themselves caught between the O'Neills and the aggressive expansionist policies of the Elizabethan administration. As

part of the government's 'surrender and regrant' schemes, the Kilwarlin Magennisses were 'pardoned' in 1552, 1575 and again in 1590, when Ever McRory Magennis held Kilwarlin in freehold from the Crown. But in 1594 O'Neill expelled him from his lands and laid waste to the area so that when Ever's brother, Brian Oge Magennis, finally managed to regain these lands post 1601 (totalling 28,000 acres) the area was in a very ruined state. Brian Oge Magennis consequently had no ready cash and had to borrow or mortgage lands, so, bit by bit, his debts mounted, resulting in the sale on long leases of his lands to the English newcomers, of whom the Hills were the principal beneficiaries.

By the time of Brian Oge Magennis's death in October 1631, Moyses Hill had acquired a substantial part of the Kilwarlin estate, including Hillsborough itself which he had bought in 1611. Brian Oge's son subsequently disposed of the remainder to Peter Hill, Moyses's eldest son in 1635. After Peter's death in 1644, his younger brother, Col. Arthur Hill, a Dublin lawyer, inherited all of the Hill property. It was Arthur who built the fort at Hillsborough and founded the town, which was to become the centre of one of Ireland's most successful family dynasties.



Plan of the fort at Hillsborough



Aerial view of the fort in 1954

Arthur Hill (1601-63) had served as a colonel in the Royalist armies during the Civil War in the 1640s, but was adroit enough to turn his coat and serve as an MP in the First Protectorate Parliament of 1654. He was rewarded by the Cromwellian administration with lands, including outright ownership of the Kilwarlin lands in 1657, which became known as the 'Manor of Hillsborough and Growle'. Already, in the early 1651, he had started to build at Hillsborough 'commanding the chief road in the County of Downe, leading from Dublin to Belfast and Carrickfergus', a residence ('it is the first storey high already'), which is probably a reference to the fort. By the end of the decade the present fort had certainly been built, and excavation in 1966-69 revealed that it occupied the site of an Early Christian rath. The new fort was enclosed by stone walls, 270 feet square, with spear-shaped bastions at each of the four corners. It is usually assumed the earthen ramparts inside the walls are also of this date, but archaeological investigation would be needed to clarify this.

After the restoration of 1660 Arthur Hill's Kilwarlin and other estates were re-granted by the new king, Charles II, and Hillsborough Fort, 'built within these few years', was constituted a Royal Garrison with twenty-four warders or armed men. The office of constable there was made hereditary in the family and Arthur was invested as the first constable (21st December 1660). Around this time Arthur also founded the present settlement at Hillsborough, complete with a new church built in 1662 to replace the old church of St. Malachy's at Crumlin. The 1662 church was itself replaced on the same site a century later with the present early Gothick-revival church

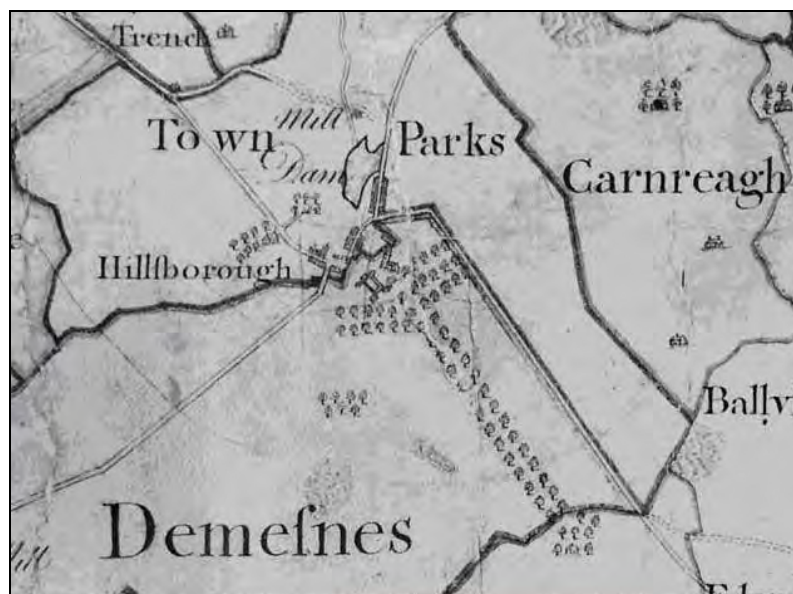
St Malachi's. In December 1662 the new settlement was granted a Royal Charter making it a Borough, while Arthur himself died in April 1663, aged sixty-two.

### The Early Years

Arthur Hill's son, William, who served as MP for Ballyshannon (1661-1692) continued to live at Hillsborough for the next twenty years. He evidently had his house in the fort, but not much is presently known about this. From the mid-1680s onwards with the onset of political difficulties in Ireland, he perhaps wisely, resided in England where he died in 1693. During his absence he missed being able to welcome King William III to his house on 19th June 1690, where he stayed for two days. The fort was prepared for his arrival and described by Frenchman Gideon Bonnivert at the time as 'a great house belonging to the King, standing on a hill on the left hand of the road'. What this house looked like we can only guess, but evidently was 'fallen into decay' when replaced in 1757-8 by the toy castle with turrets we see today, built to a design of Christopher Myers and visited by Mrs Delany at that time.

In 1693 his son Michael Hill (1672-1699), who had earlier served as MP for Saltash in England, inherited his father's properties, which had become through various marriages an impressive landed estate. Hill was returned for the Borough of Hillsborough, but appears not to have spent much time there and died in 1699.

Michael Hill's estates, which stood at 68,875 statute acres, already one of the largest in Ireland, were inherited by his six year old son Trevor Hill (1693-1742). Trevor Hill's mother, Anne Trevor, an heiress in her own right, is known to have undertook building works at Hillsborough during these years. In January 1707 and again in October 1717 for example, she was consulting a nearby landowner and amateur architect, Samuel Waring, on architectural matters. It seems very probably that she was building a new house to the south of the church at Edenticullo, in what is later became part of The Great Park. Two early maps, one dating to the 1746 by NF Martin (lost) and another dating to 1750s (wrongly dated to 1771) both depict a tree-lined avenue aligned roughly on the church/fort, leading to a house on a rise just south of what became in c1770 the lake.

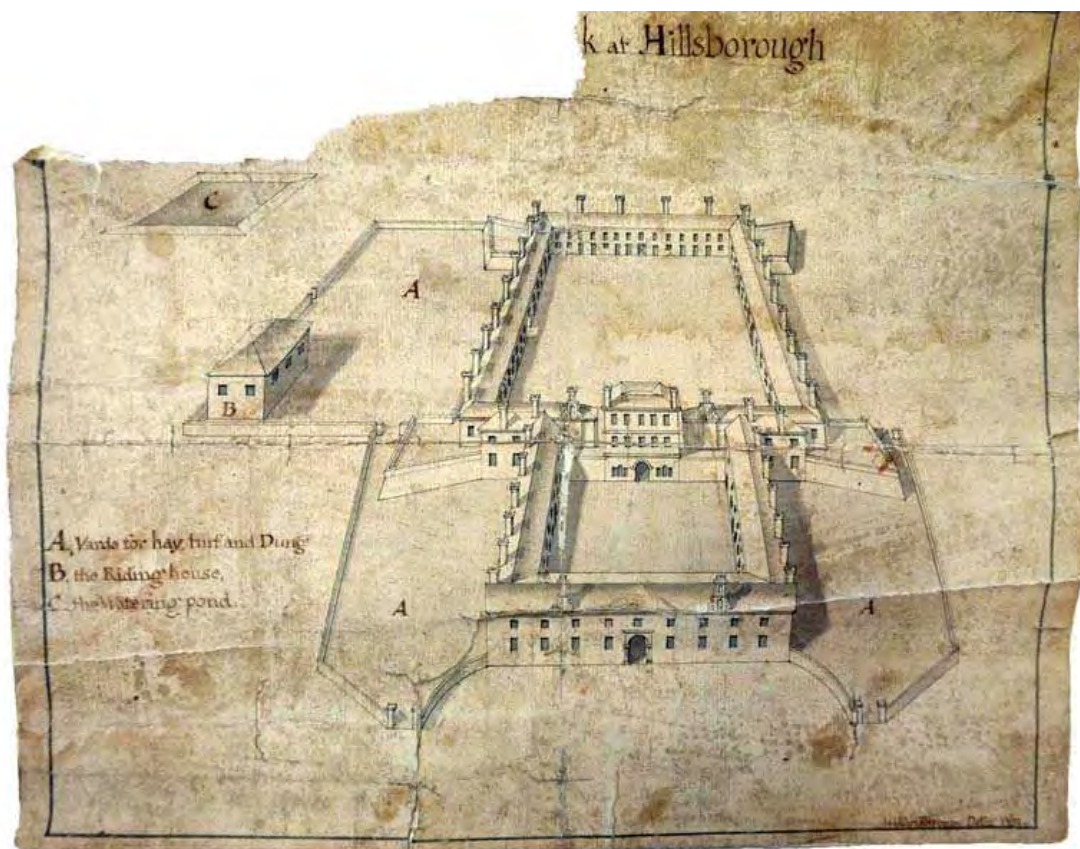


Detail of map of Hillsborough in the 1750s showing avenue to house in Edenticullo

By 1713 Trevor Hill had gained his majority, at which time his income was reckoned £4,000. Once he came of age he wasted little time getting himself elected as MP (Whig) for Hillsborough and two years later was elected for Co. Down (1715-17); in England he tried and failed to win his father's seat at Saltash, but instead got elected for Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire instead (1715-22) and also acquired the lease of Turweston Manor in Buckinghamshire. He was elevated to the peerage as Viscount Hillsborough in 1717, but from 1720 seems to have spent much of the year in England, where Horace Walpole once described him as 'one of the most profligate and worthless men of the age, with good parts'. However, on his death on 5th May 1742, the Dublin Gazette described him as 'the best land lord in Ireland'.

The only major impact he may have had on Hillsborough is the building of a large barracks complex, but it remains uncertain how much of this was actually built. In 1732 he commissioned the English architect and author, William Halfpenny, to design a large barracks building, comprising two large rectangular courts, flanked by two storey ranges with a three-storey five-bay house between them. Some of this may have been built, for Harris writing in 1744 referred to at Hillsborough:

'the ruins of a noble house, built within the area of a regular fortification, which is now entirely demolished, having been burned down by accidental fire, and in the room of it two large Squares erected at great expense, designed by the late Lord Hillsborough for barrack'.



Plan of the Hillsborough Horse Barracks by William Halfpenny, 1732



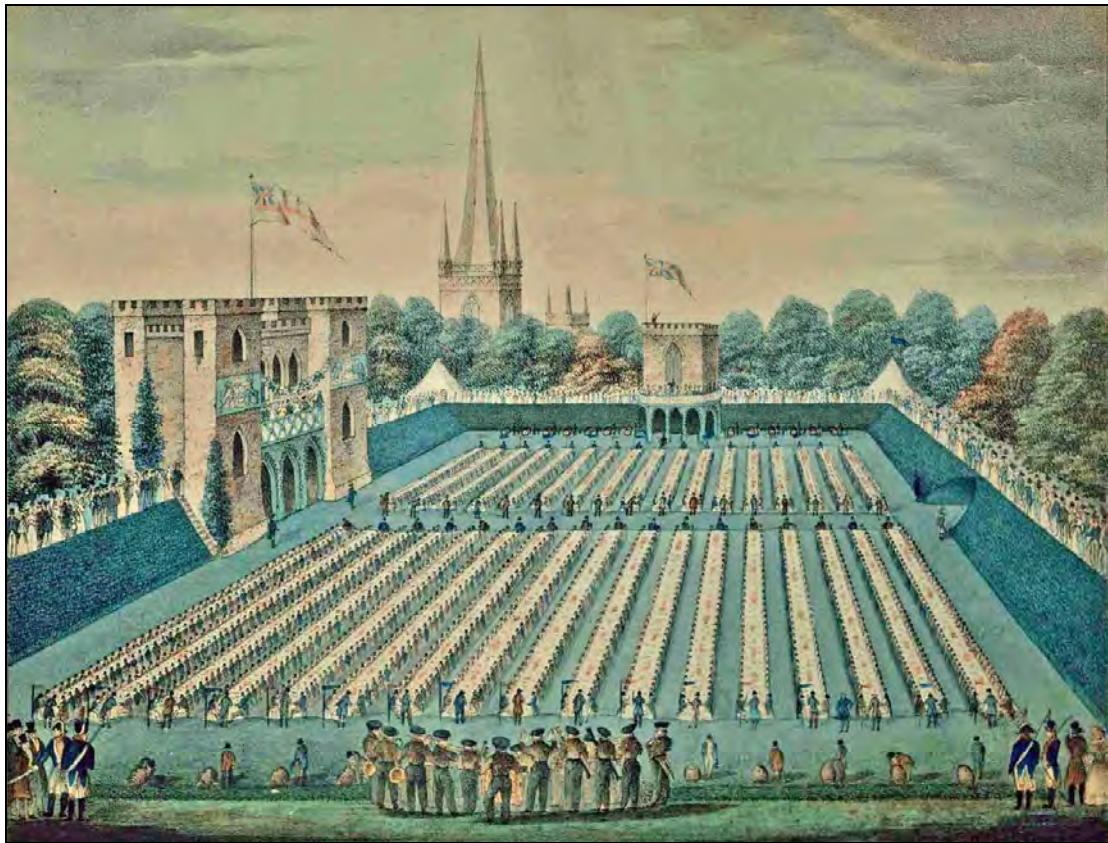
Lithograph of the 'Castle at Hillsboro' by James Duffield Harding (1798-1863) based on a sketch by Robert O'Callaghan Newenham (1770-1848) and printed by Charles Joseph Hullmandel of London. It is undated but was one of a number of lithographs published in 1830, while the original sketch was done in the 1820s by Newenham on one of his many tours of inspection of the General Barracks of Ireland. The fort had been substantially rebuilt in the late 1750s as a Gothick folly in the grounds and its 'ruinous' condition in the early 19th century was no doubt considered a part of its picturesque qualities.



View of the south side of the fort from the lake at Hillsborough by Vice-Admiral Ker, probably dating to the 1820s. St Malachi's Church is to the right of the fort.



Photograph of Hillsborough Fort in the 1950s, clad in slates. The walls and towers were originally rendered, but in the late 19th century were clad in slates in efforts to keep out the damp. The building was re-rendered in the 1980s for similar reasons.



A grand fete held in October 1837 to celebrate the marriage of the young Earl of Hillsborough (later the 4th Marquess of Downshire) and Frances, daughter of Viscount Combermere. The celebrations in the 'green of the fort' were attended by around 3,500 tenants. A bugler standing on the gazebo gave notice of the toasts. This illustration was by John Johnston, a deaf and dumb Belfast artist; two other published lithographs of the event were based on drawings by Louisa Morris ('Louisa M') a local school teacher.

## The First Marquis

The most famous and successful member of the Hill family was Wills Hill (1718-93), one-time member of the British cabinet and first Marquis of Downshire - the man who largely created Hillsborough as we see it today and raised the family status to the upper echelons of British society.

Wills Hill was only twenty-four when he succeeded his father, Trevor Hill, in 1742 to become the 2nd Viscount Hillsborough. By that period he was already an MP in the London Parliament representing Warwick (1741-1756). In 1751 he was raised as 1st Earl of Hillsborough and following a string of English titles in the 1760s and 70s, was raised to be Marquis of Downshire in 1789. These titles followed his remarkable political career, beginning in 1754 with his inclusion onto George II's Privy Council, then a succession of posts including First Commissioner of Trade and Plantations (1763); Postmaster-General (1766) and Secretary of State for the Colonies (1768-82). It was his obtuse, heavy-handed approach to colonial affairs in this latter post that was one of the contributory factors leading to the American War of Independence.

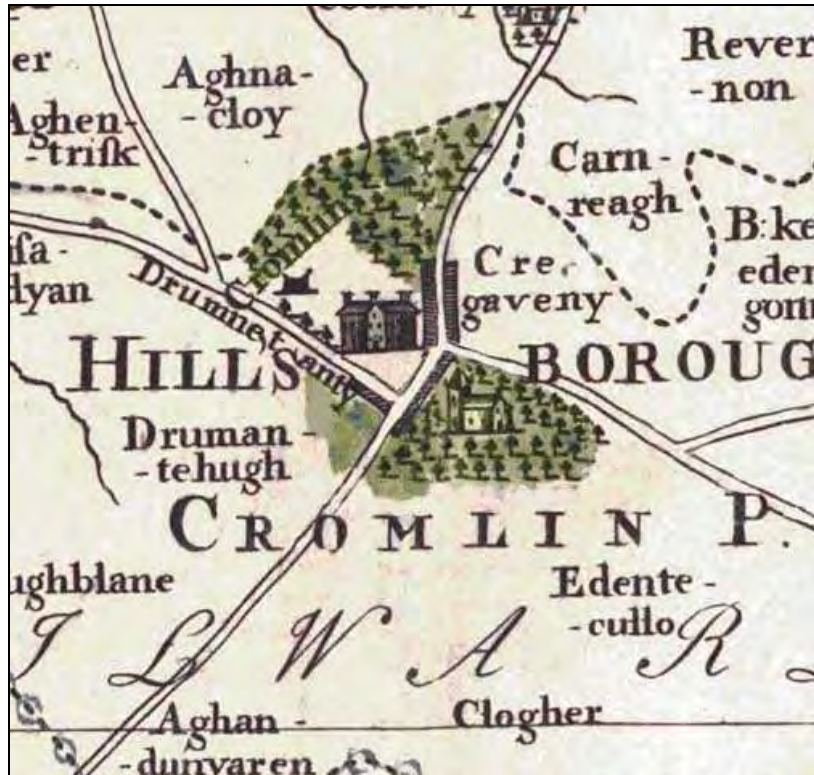
While engaged in a very politically active career, Wills Hill also found time to be resident in Hillsborough for lengthy periods each year and was active in transforming the demesne. Indeed, work seemed to have been underway on demesne alterations as soon as he inherited, for in 1744 Harris noted that the new Viscount (as he then was) had 'fixed upon a plan for a new town to be built in the form of a large square' which was to have a 'stately market house' in the centre. By that stage he had 'erected two ranges of commodious houses' and intended 'to build a new mansion'.

The 'new mansion', which early accounts refer to as the 'The Lodge' was located on the site of the present Royal Residence, on what is the highest point in the village. It is not known when building began, but the house is clearly shown here on the 1755 Kennedy map of County Down. When Mrs Delany, the diarist and wife of the Dean of Down, visited Hillsborough in October 1758, she found Wills Hill, by then raised as the first Earl of Hillsborough, was in residence ('well bred, sensible and entertaining'); she noted that his 'house is not extraordinary, but prettily fitted up and furnished; the dining room, not long added to the house, is a fine room, 33ft by 26'. This dining room may well be basically the same as the State Dining Room in the house today, though its west front was extended outwards in the 19th century. The following day she described how:

'Lord Hillsborough, Mr. Bayly, and I walked around the improvements, a gravel path two Irish miles long, the ground laid out in very good taste, some wood, some nurseries; shrubs and flowers diversify the scene; a pretty piece of water with an island in it, and all the views pleasant'.

The 'water with an island' was a reference to the lake in the Small Park - a lake that had been earlier adapted as a mill pond, and in medieval times must have been the location of the Magennis crannog. Her description indicates that work on the park had started by that time; it is possible that the ornamental section, which included a hermitage, in what became later 'The Great Park', may also have begun at this time.





The location of the house at Hillsborough from Kennedy's Map of Co. Down, 1755

One of the demesne improvements undertaken by the Wills Hill, the Earl of Hillsborough, was focussed on the old 17th century artillery fort. Mrs Delany on her visit of October 1758 noted that the earl:

'is obliged to keep a garrison there and has a demand on the Crown of three shillings and sixpence a day; the old castle is fallen to decay, but as it is a testimony of the antiquity of his family, he is determined to keep it up'.

The earl had engaged an engineer/architect from Cumbria called Christopher Myers, who had earlier worked for the Earl of Antrim, remodelling Glenarm Castle. Building works undertaken at this time at Hillsborough included the remodelling of the star-shaped fort where four round turreted towers were added to the bastions; new entrances were cut through the SE and SW sides and the NW entrance was transformed into a two-storey Gothick gazebo. The fort's 'old castle' that Mrs Delany described had 'fallen to decay' was transformed into a sham Gothick castle with turrets at the corners, much as it appears today. It must have been only just finished when seen by Mrs Delany who remarked that it 'consists of one large room, with small ones in the turrets'. She also remarked that the

'court behind it [the area within the fort] measures just one English acre, and is laid down in a bowling green, and round it is a raised high terrace, at each corner of which is a square of about fifty feet, which are to make four gardens, one for roses only, the other for all sorts of flowers - these on each side of the castle; the other two for evergreens and flowering shrubs'.

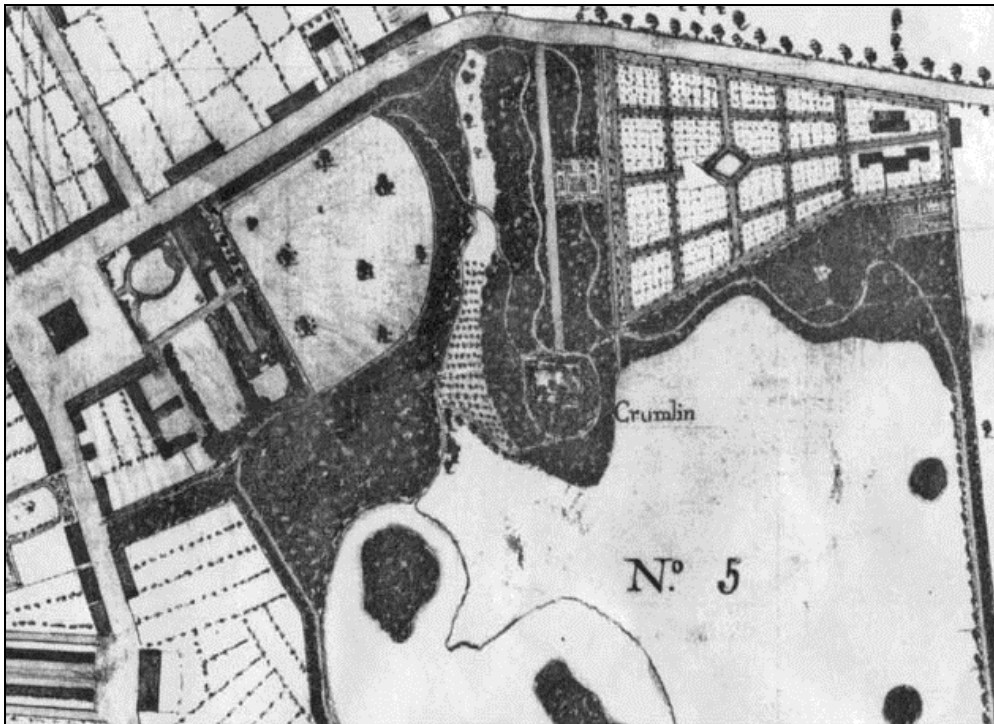
After the fort was finished the earl turned his attention to the St Malachi's (C of I) church, whose rebuilding in gothic style appears to have been started around 1760 and may also have involved Myers, an architect who elsewhere played a major role in the re-introduction of Gothic(k) architecture into Ireland. The architect Sanderson Miller (1716-1780) was also consulted by the earl at this time, and may have been involved

in its design. Its elegant spire was the work of the stonemasons James and his son David McBlain, who also designed and carved the gate screen with flanking school-houses that leads from the street onto the magnificent tree-lined approach to the church. The interior of the church, which was completed in 1775, contains among its treasures, a Snetzler organ (1773) and a memorial by Nollekens (1774)

The stone mason James McBlain (1729-1792) may also have been responsible for rebuilding the court house in the town square during the 1780s replacing an earlier building noted by the Rev. Beaufort in his journal in 1765. Prior to its enlargement around 1818-19, this building, built as a Tholsel and market house, had comprised the two storey core of the present building. It lies opposite what used to be the front gates leading into an oval front court of Hillsborough Lodge.

When Mrs Delany had visited Hillsborough in 1758 she had reported that the earl had ambitions to build a grand house elsewhere, presumably in the area to the south of the church in what became the Great Park. His grand plan, as reported by Mrs Delany, was to make the Bishop of Down and Connor (then Arthur Smyth, an uncle of John Wesley) a gift of his 'present residence' [Hillsborough Lodge] together with 'his improvements, lake and island'. The idea of having the bishop live in the village, where he could keep an eye on him may have been appealing to the earl, but the plan never materialised.

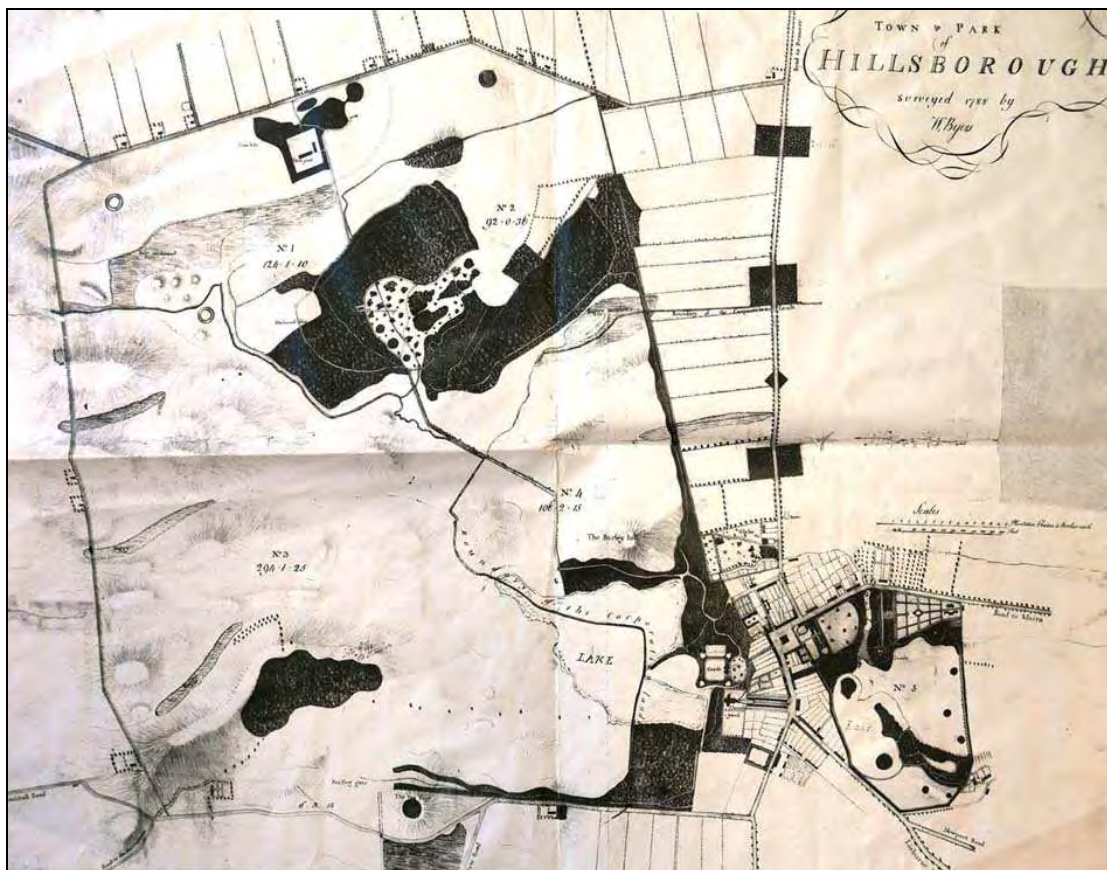
There is little evidence for any rebuilding or remodelling of Hillsborough Lodge during the 1760s, and it seems entirely likely that the modest house described by Mrs Delany in 1758 is the same one as that shown on the detailed demesne map 'Town and Park of Hillsborough' drawn by William Byers in 1788. This house, for which there is a surviving inventory of contents dating to 1777, occupies the same footprint on the Byers 1788 map as the present house, with a north wing (as today) and a south wing that projected at right angles to the front facade (as today). When Beaufort visited Hillsborough a second time in November 1787, he made no more than a passing mention of the 'earl's lodge' and the 'fine market house' opposite.



The Small Park on the William Byers map of 1788

The 'Small Park' shown on the Byers 1788 map was almost certainly largely created during the 1760s. This park is much the same as that which exists today, save mainly for the new section south the old Moira Road, which was added in the 1830s. Prior to this later enlargement, the Small Park occupied an area of 68 acres, and contained features that have since remained remarkably unaltered; namely, a nine-acre lake with small 0.4 acre island, mentioned by Mrs Delany; a four-acre walled garden and associated frame yards, a small west lawn and a large fifteen-acre meadow west of the lake. One feature shown on the 1788 map lying south of the lake, is the ice-house whose entrance is lined with large rounded sandstone blocks, which deliberately imitates a grotto or the entrance to a mysterious cave. This too probably belongs to the earl's improvements of the late 1750s or 1760s.

The 'Great Park' to the south of the village appears to have been largely created during 1770s. This included building a wall around the park at a cost of £1,285. The lake in the Great Park, which was made by building two massive dams, certainly existed by 1777, when it is shown on the Taylor & Skinner Map. However, it may have been made, or partly made, well over ten years previously, as the Rev. Beaufort during his brief 1765 visit to Hillsborough, mentioned the 'water & prospect' when also noting the 'castle & Gothic Room, with bowling green'. The estate cash books make reference to the 'extension of lake' in 1787-92, so it is possible that this lake was enlarged during this later period.



The William Byers Map of Hillsborough Great Park, Town and Small Park, 1788



Detail from the 1803 Town Map of Hillsborough

## The Second Marquis

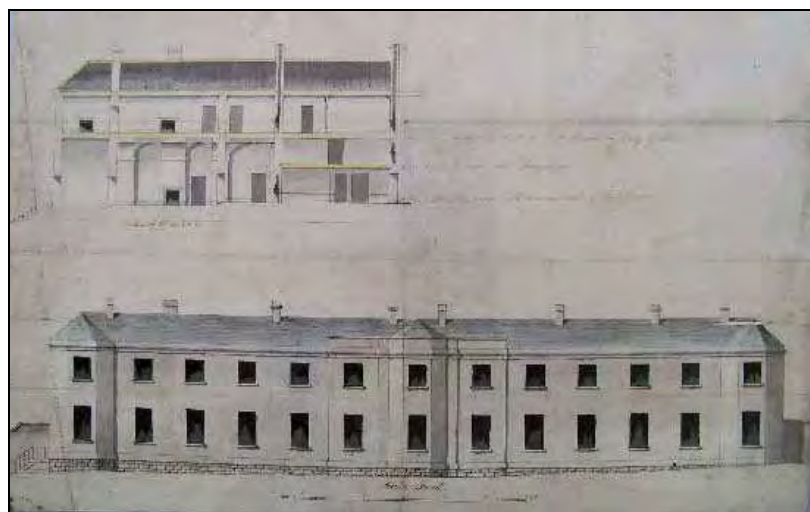
Wills Hill had been raised to become the first Marquis of Downshire in 1789, but he did not have long to enjoy his new title, for he died on 7th October 1793. He was succeeded by his only son Arthur Hill (1753-1801), who became 2nd Marquis of Downshire in 1793 and inherited 50,825 statute acres, including a house on Gloucester Street, Dublin (their town residence), Hertford Castle, Hertfordshire; a house on Hanover Square, London and Blessington House, Co. Wicklow, which was burned by insurgents in 1798. To add to his wealth, the earl had married Mary Sandys, Baroness Sandys of Ombersley in 1786, one of the greatest heiresses of the day. Though this marriage he inherited Easthampstead Park, Berkshire, which became from then onwards their main English home. Like his father, he was very politically active, holding Irish (Co Down) and English (Lostwithiel & Malmesbury) parliamentary seats. He was at the centre of the most famous political dispute of the age, when the Stewarts, a *nouveau* north Donegal Presbyterian family, who had married wealth and bought extensive lands in East Down, challenged the political dominance of the long established Hills. The enmity between the two families - the clash between old money and new - is the stuff of fiction. In 1790 for example huge sums were spent by both families (the Stewarts £60,000 and the Hills £30,000) on getting their man elected. Ten years later, after Robert Stewart, Lord Castlereagh, played a key role in drawing up the terms of the union between Ireland and Great Britain, it was guaranteed that the Hills would be very hostile to the union, as indeed they were.

The vast sums spent by the Hills on elections probably ensured that their spending on house and demesne improvements were rather more limited than might otherwise have been the case. However, as soon as he inherited the 2nd Marquis engaged the architect Robert Furze Brettingham to carry out enlargements and modifications to his house at Hillsborough. These works seems to be have been



Detail of the 1803 Map of Hillsborough showing the house, wings, stable block and entrance forecourt after the building enlargement and remodelling by Robert Brettingham, 1793-97

very focussed on the interiors, with the client often changing his mind and carrying out changes without consulting the architect. Mid-way through the project in 1795 he changed his Clerk of Works from William Forsyth to Richard Sharland. Brettingham's plans for 'Hillsborough House just finished' were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1797. The west front of the original seven bay two storey house was given a plain classical facade with pediment, while the south wing facing onto the old Moira Road had a symmetrical unified front of two stories, with canted bays at the centre at both ends (see below). The present stable yard was also built at this time and Brettingham's finished house is depicted on the detailed map of Hillsborough town in 1803 (above). The earl committed suicide in September 1801, leaving an heir aged only thirteen.



The south front (which faced the Moira Road) after re-modelling by Robert Brettingham

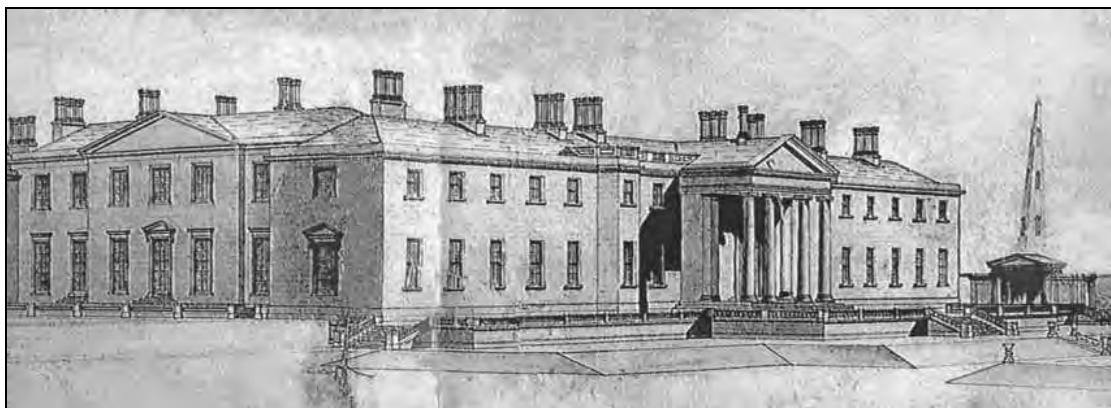
## The Third Marquis

The heir to the 2nd marquis of Downshire was his son, Arthur Blundell Sandys Trumbull Hill, who became the 3rd Marquess of Downshire (1788-1845). He was to prove a very popular man in later life, but in 1801 he was still at school. Later he attended Christ Church, Oxford University and not a great deal seemed to happen at Hillsborough until around 1818-19, when the markethouse/courthouse was enlarged to its present size.

However, in 1810 the Lichfield-based landscape gardener John Webb (c1754-1828), a former pupil and then partner of the famous landscape gardener William Emes, was engaged by the young marquis to produce plans to re-landscape the grounds at Hillsborough Castle. Webb's scheme envisaged dramatically re-landscaping and enlarging both the Great Park and the Small Park, both parkland areas of which would meet each other at the Moira Road, which he proposed should be re-directed away from the south front of the house. The south front itself he believed should be the main house entrance, approached by a short avenue from the newly re-directed Moira Road.

Webb's proposals were not carried out, but they certainly influenced developments at Hillsborough undertaken by the 3rd Marquis. From the around 1815 the Downshire estate started to acquire the leases of the properties fronting the old Moira Road flanking the south side of the house, and planting the perimeter of the newly acquired area with trees. By 1833 the only property left on the road was the mid-18th century Quaker meeting house and burying ground. This was finally moved to Park Street in 1836-37 and the road closed, having been earlier (in about 1826) re-directed to its present course, which is the one suggested by Webb. The burial ground plot however remained in the grounds and accessed through a special gate.

During the late 1820s some changes to Hillsborough house were undertaken by the Newry architect Thomas Duff, but more substantial alterations took place in the 1830s and again in the early 1840s, when the house assumed its present appearance. Thomas Duff again had a hand in these alterations, but the principal architect was James Sands, from England with some assistance from his uncle William Sands. We have an idea of some of these changes from plans of the building, which were made for insurance purposes in 1833 and 1839 and signed by Henry Murray, one of the agents for the Downshire family estates. James Sands, whose 1844 plan of the house



James Sands alterations to the south front with new portico, terrace and Doric pavilion

survives, remodelled the south front, giving it the present Ionic portico, which echoes Webb's 1810 original proposal to place the main front entrance here. The house entrance however remained on the east side and while the old oval sweep stayed in place, the mid-18th century entrance gates facing the entrance and lying opposite the courthouse were shifted to one side, towards the stable range; the wrought iron gates themselves may be the ones presently giving access to the Church Walk on the opposite side of the square. In place of the old main gate entrance, a wall was built with trees planted on the inside, no doubt reflecting the 19th century obsession with privacy; members of the Hill family clearly did not like the idea of members of the public being able to gaze at the front of their house from the public square.



The 1833 Ordnance Survey map of the Small Park at Hillsborough showing the old Moira Road just before its removal. Its replacement, built in 1829, can be seen to its south. The Quaker Meeting house was moved in 1836-7 when the road was finally closed.



Detail from the 1856 Robert Manning Map of Hillsborough showing the new James Sands wing with its portico, new south terrace, Doric pavilion at the east end & the two rectangular parterres, one below the south terrace and the other on the west side of the house. Note also the old entrance gate has been moved to a position beside the stable yard.

The new south facade of the house with its portico, instead of serving as the front, as Webb had proposed, was given a balustraded garden terrace with a charming Greek-Revival Doric summer house at one end. Below this new terrace, a rectangular parterre was laid out, while another rectangular parterre was created on the west side of the house, flanking a wide straight path (running alongside the former line of the old Moira Road) that became in the 1880s the Irish Yew Walk. At the west end of this walk a pond was created and the spoil used to make a hill on its west side, upon which was built a summer house, later to be replaced by the Lady Alice Temple.

As part their plans for their new terrace and gardens at Hillsborough, the Marquis and his wife visited the famous sculptor James Farrell in his Dublin studio in June 1845. Farrell was subsequently 'given an extensive commission for ornamental statuary for his [the Marquis's] newly erected terrace and gardens at Hillsborough'. Whether or not Farrell actually produced any sculpture has not been established, for the 3rd Marquis died shortly afterwards, in September 1845, aged only fifty seven.



Following the death of the 3rd Marquess of Downshire in 1845, it was decided to commemorate him with a memorial on a hill south-west of the village. A tall 130ft high fluted Doric sandstone column on a square base was built with himself atop (sculptor unknown), and this prominent landmark, which can be seen for miles around, could be described as the last substantial architectural addition to Hillsborough in the 19th century. It was designed by William Murray, the cousin, partner and successor of Frances Johnson and the design for the column was exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1847. The column was erected in 1848.



The Small Park as shown on the 1858 Ordnance Survey map showing the improvements by the 3rd Marquis following the closure of the old Moira Road

## Post 1850 Developments

The second half of the 19th century witnessed very little building work at Hillsborough Castle, while the Small Park remained largely unaltered save for the creation of an arboretum, the building of more glasshouses in the walled garden and the addition of the Irish Yew Walk. The Marquesses of Downshire increasingly spent more and more time in England, particularly at Easthampstead Park in Berkshire. This was rebuilt at great expense in 1860 for Arthur Wills Blundell Sandys Trumbull Windsor Hill (1812-1868), the 4th Marquess of Downshire, who was known as the 'Big Marquess' and whose estates extended to 115,000 acres (465km<sup>2</sup>). He was succeeded in 1868 by his son Arthur Wills Blundell Sandys Roden Hill, 5th Marquess of Downshire (1844-1874) and he in turn in 1874 by his eldest son, Arthur Wills John Trumbull Hill, 6th Marquess of Downshire (1871-1918).

The main impact on the park made by the 4th Marquess (1812-1868) and the 5th Marquess (1844-1874) was in the planting of trees, mainly conifers, particularly at the upper end of the lake. This included a *Pinus radiata* (formerly called *Pinus insignis*) or Monterey Pine, which was planted by the marquess himself in 1872; by 1926 it was 100 feet high and by 2005 it was measured by Aubrey Fennell at 43.5m high with girth of 4.39m, which was claimed then to be second tallest of its kind in Ireland. Other large conifer trees noted in this area during a visit in 1905 included *Abies pinsapo*; *Abies Douglasii* (*Pseudotsuga macrocarpa*); *Abies Albertiana* (*Tsuga heterophylla*); *Abies Deodara alba* (*Cedrus deodara*); *Cupressus erecta viridis* (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana erecta viridis*); *Thuja gigantea* (*Thuja plicata*); *Libocedrus decurrens* (incense cedar) and *Sequoiadendron giganteum*. The lime



The Lady Alice Temple around 1900



The Irish Yew Walk about 1900

avenue (*Tilia x europaea*), which follows the old route to the medieval Crumlin chapel, was planted around this time (c.1860), and was originally aligned at the south end upon a 'summer house', which predated the Lady Alice Temple, and stood on the hillock overlooking the new pond.

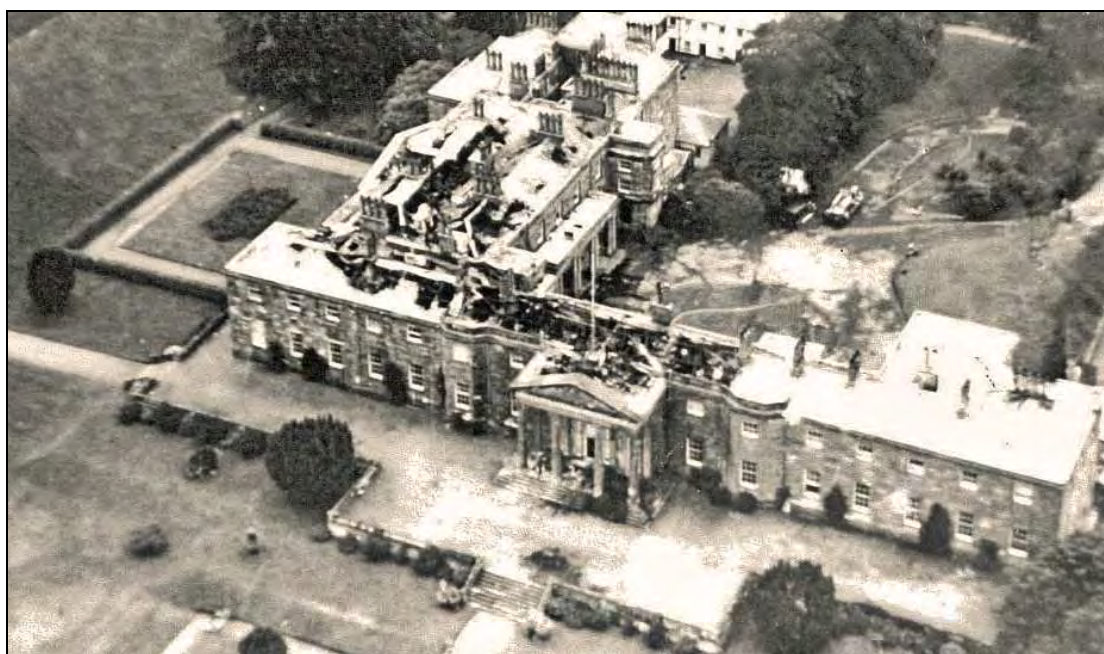
The 6th Marquess of Downshire (1871-1918) had relatively little connection with Hillsborough, or indeed Ireland, other than receiving the rents. However, his uncle, Col. Arthur Hill (1846-1931), lived at Hillsborough for long periods during the last quarter of the 19th century, serving as MP for Down (1880-85) and West Down (1885-98 & 1907-08). Probably not long after his marriage to Annie Harrison in 1877, Col. Hill laid out the Irish Yew Walk, one of the most dramatic additions to the Small Park made in the later 19th century. Described as a 'ramped allee', this feature, is aligned upon the south portico of the house and comprises a wide path flanked by a gently sloping grass verge on each side on which has been planted a line of Irish or Florence Court yews. At the lower end this path culminates in a balustrade with flanking urns overlooking the pond and aligned upon a circular colonnaded and domed neo-classical garden temple, known as Lady Alice's temple. This striking garden building was built by Col. Hill in honour of his sister, Lady Alice Maria Hill,

later Countess of Bective. The temple is unusual in that the ten Ionic columns supporting a masonry entablature & copper-clad masonry dome are made of cast-iron.

With the passing of the 1903 Land Act, the large Downshire estate lands in Ireland started quickly to be sold off to the tenants. Col. Hill retreated to England and the house was leased to Sir Thomas and Lady Edith Dixon until they purchased Wilmont House in South Belfast in 1919; this is now a public park and host to the City of Belfast International Rose Garden.

Following the partition of Ireland, it was decided by the government, after much deliberation, that Hillsborough Castle would be purchased by the Office of Works to serve as the new residence of the governors of Northern Ireland. It was acquired in 1925 and subsequently became known as 'Government House'. The Great Park was also acquired by the Office of Works, but then leased to the Department of Agriculture; the area around the lake is open to the public. The fort and courthouse were retained by the Downshire family, but leased to the government and are currently managed by Historic Environment Division of the Department of the Environment.

Following alterations to the house, the first governor, James Hamilton, 3rd Duke of Abercorn, took up residence in October 1925 and remained until 1945. During his tenure as governor the house suffered a major fire in 1934, which severely damaged or destroyed much of the building. Indeed, much of present interior of the house is the product of remodelling in 1935-36 following this fire (see image below).



Aerial view of Hillsborough House following the fire of 1934

It was also during the Duke of Abercorn's time as governor when the frontage with the village square received the elaborate and magnificent wrought iron gates and screen from Richhill, Co. Armagh. According to a family history they were made in 1745 (but the evidence is limited) by the Thornberry Brothers of Armagh, about whom little is known and originally stood in front of 'Richhill Castle', as it is called - a curvilinear gabled manor house in the village of Richhill, Co. Armagh, which was built in the early 1660s. The gates, without doubt the finest example of 18th century wrought iron gates and screen to survive in Ireland, are eighteen to twenty feet high

and are topped with the Richardson family arms - the family that originally lived in Richhill Castle. The gates were moved 'for safe keeping' in 1936 in the dead of night (according to the some local inhabitants of Richhill) amidst a storm of protest at the time. They were painted white for many years, then dark blue and black.



The Richhill Gates and Screen during the 1970s when painted white

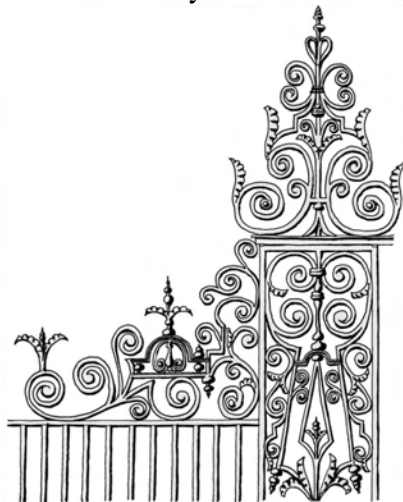
During the war the Duke of Abercorn received many distinguished visitors at Hillsborough Castle, including Robert Menzies, the Prime Minister of Australia, and Eleanor Roosevelt. Once the war was over he decided to retire as governor and was succeeded by William Leveson-Gower, 4th Earl Granville (1945-1952), whose wife was Lady Rose Bowes-Lyon, the late aunt of the present Queen. Not surprisingly perhaps, royal visits to Hillsborough increased and subsequently the residence became their home on visits to Northern Ireland. Lady Grenville remodelled a garden on the west front of the house around 1950. The next governor, John de Vere Loder, 2nd Baron Wakehurst (1952-1964) added planting to the glen and rockery, while Lady O'Neill was subsequently engaged to advise on the replanting and refurbishment of the gardens. The final two governors were John Maxwell Erskine, 1st Baron Erskine of Rerrick (1964-68) and Ralph Grey, Baron Grey of Naunton (1968-1972).

In 1972 the office of governor was abolished to be replaced by a Secretary of State for the Province. Fortunately, the new post was considered to be a successor of the office of governor so Hillsborough Castle was retained as 'Government House' and became the Ulster home of a string of Conservative and Labour politicians serving as the Secretaries of State, from William Whitelaw (1972-73); Francis Pym (1973-74); Merlyn Rees (1974-76); Roy Mason (1976-79); Humphrey Atkins (1979-81); James Prior (1981-84); Douglas Herd (1984-85); Tom King (1985-89); Peter Brooke (1989-92); Sir Patrick Mayhew (1992-97); Mo Mowlam (1997-99); Peter Mandelson (1999-2001); John Reid (2001-02); Paul Murphy (2002-2005); Peter Hain

(2005-06); Shaun Woodward (2007-10); Owen Paterson (2010-12) and the present incumbent, Theresa Villiers. All of these post holders used Hillsborough Castle as their residence except Rees and Mason who preferred to be accommodated in the luxurious Culloden Hotel, Belfast, instead.

From 1972 until more recent time, the gardens were maintained, but not much was done to add to the planting. In 2000 Action Mental Health assumed the lease for the walled garden and from 2003 until 2014 the Praxis Care Group had the lease of the walled garden and ran it as 'The Secret Garden', while the garden also served as the venue for 'Garden Show Ireland' until 2013.

In 2014 the Historic Royal Palaces have assumed the licence to run Hillsborough Castle and gardens, which will be restored and opened to the public throughout the year. Historic Royal Palaces is a Non-Departmental Public Body with exempt charitable status, established by Royal Charter in 1998 to care for and manage five royal residences, The Tower of London, Hampton Court, Kensington Palace State Apartments, The Banqueting House, Whitehall and Kew Palace with Queen Charlotte's Cottage. The arrival of Historic Royal palaces at Hillsborough does not alter the status of the property as a functioning royal residence, whilst it also remains the home of the Northern Ireland Secretary of State.



#### **Some Further Reading:**

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- Waterman, Dudley (1966) In Jope (ed.) *The Archaeological Survey of County Down*. HMSO.

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