

“Before I forget . . .”

NUMBER XVII

JOURNAL OF
THE POYNTZPASS AND
DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

DECEMBER 2022

Front Cover - St. Mary's Parish Church, Drumbanagher.



How fortunate we are to have the architectural gem that is St. Mary's Parish Church nestled at the foothills of Drumbanagher between Poyntzpass and Jerrettspass in County Armagh. It overlooks both the canal and the railway and is clearly visible from the main road, especially northwards from Newry.

This beautiful church, in Early English Gothic Revival style, was built between 1855 and 1859 at the behest of the Close Family. William Playfair of Edinburgh had been chosen to design Drumbanagher House for the Closes, but for their church they chose the Newry architect William Joseph Barre (1830-1867). There are many notable buildings designed by this immensely talented architect; in Newry for example, the First Presbyterian (formerly the Unitarian) Church John Mitchel Place, and Riverside Church on Basin Walk. In Belfast, his buildings include the Ulster Hall and Albert Clock Memorial and nearer home, the Crozier Memorial in Banbridge.

A leading figure of the family at the time was the Irish Conservative politician Maxwell Close (1827-1903). His wife Anna Brownlow was sister of the politician Charles Brownlow, the First Baron Lurgan of Brownlow House, Lurgan (also designed by William Playfair), and aunt of the Second Baron Lurgan, owner of the celebrated racing greyhound Master McGrath of the 1860s/70s. It is said that Master McGrath features in the centre of the rose window in the church.

Between 2020 and 2021 St. Mary's was extensively and sensitively restored to stand as a distinctive landmark to our ecclesiastical and cultural heritage for many years to come.

This edition contains a comprehensive transcription of the headstones in the adjoining churchyard.

Photographs of St. Mary's in this edition were taken by Alan Gibson of that parish.

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THE POYNTZPASS AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY 2022 – 2023

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The Society welcomes correspondence and would be particularly glad to hear from anyone with old photographs or other documents relating to our area in the past.

You can contact us using our email address: history@poyntzpass.co.uk

or by writing to :

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Our website is: www.poyntzpass.co.uk

Facebook: Poyntzpass and District Local History Society

NEW MEMBERS VERY WELCOME.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to all those who helped in the production of this edition of *'Before I forget...'*. In particular we wish to thank all our contributors for their research and for their work in converting that research into illustrated articles. Also Mark Skillen, www.mediafourteen.com, for his patience and skill in the graphic design of the magazine.

We are indebted to the management of The Meeting Place for facilitating our meetings and to the TPM Credit Union for putting up with us for so long.

THE POYNTZPASS AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

I am delighted that Poyntzpass and District Local History Society has been able to celebrate a significant milestone and 50th Birthday in the 2021/22 season, for during the previous two years, our activities have been seriously disrupted. It is a remarkable achievement given our small rural population and is a testament to those who had the inspiration to set up the Local History Society all those years ago. It is a fundamental aim of the society to keep our monthly 'talks' on our agenda and for this to happen, members volunteer to research topics and deliver their findings at our monthly meetings.

We all enjoy the wit, enthusiasm, interest and friendly informal atmosphere in which the talks are presented at our monthly meetings. Each speaker has their own style and perspective. It's always good to keep debate and discussion going. At times we have even had a song, poetry or a dance to finish proceedings! The Society has been a sociable place to meet neighbours, old friends and new acquaintances and to share memories over the past 50 years.

Our most recent journal was published during the Covid pandemic restrictions, but we are hopeful that the publication of this edition will be an opportunity for members to gather for a more-normal launch of our journal. The journal has become such a vital part of our work for it records the painstaking efforts of our members and presents their research to a much wider audience. Indeed we regularly get requests from native 'Pass folk overseas and others far away for copies of back numbers.

During Covid we have embraced the digital age and have been able to make contact and provide information to a wider audience via Zoom, Facebook and YouTube.

As usual the content of *'Before I forget...'* is based mainly on talks given by members of our Society in the recent past. The content of this magazine is a combination of talks presented pre-Covid, over zoom during the Covid restrictions, and those since we were able to meet in real life again. 'My Family at War' by Dermot McGrath was delivered before the restrictions, as were Michael Anderson's 'Bennet Diaries' and Rob Morrow's 'Local Involvement in the United Irishmen'. 'Ballymoyer and the Japanese Lady' was delivered over Zoom by Lorna Quin – a really fascinating story worthy of any Hollywood blockbuster! 'A Fatal Affray in the Far Pass' also over Zoom by Hugh Daly, informed us of tragic events two hundred years ago.

Some years ago the late John Clarke contacted the Society from Australia, with some interesting notes on his early life. He was encouraged to expand on this but nothing more was heard until recently, when through his cousin Alan Clarke, we received a much extended Memoir. We are very grateful to Alan for editing John's 'Random Tales of My early Life,' which gives us a great insight into family life in the different era and the economic landscape of the time. 'Placenames not on the Map' by Frank Watters, is a reminder that there is interesting local history everywhere around us.

The article by Barbara Best on 'Acton Old Graveyard' is the text of a talk given one pleasant evening in the summer sun during a group visit to the Old Graveyard. What added to the occasion was that it was a first chance for members to tentatively engage and speak to each other on the opening up after Covid restrictions.

We have included an extract from a 1984 'Pass Times' interview with the late Ann Ferris, who passed away earlier this year. Ann was greatly admired in racing circles as a jockey, breeder and trainer and as a popular member of our community. Her many achievements featured in several of our recent talks. There is a memoir by the late Sara and Minnie Savage about their home 'Laurel Hill'. As part of an on-going 'Headstone Inscriptions' project, this edition includes a very comprehensive transcription of the headstones in the churchyard of St Mary's Drumbanagher. This is the product of many hours of work by a small dedicated group of members.

Finally a sincere 'thank you' to all who have contributed articles, to those who have helped with photographs, to local businesses for their invaluable sponsorship and to you, our readers, for your continuing interest and support. I trust you will find something here to interest and uplift you.

Fiona Bryson. (Chairman) December 2022.