

# CLIFTON STREET CEMETERY

*North Belfast's Historic Gem*

*Compiled by Joe Baker*



*Glenravel Local History Project*

# INTRODUCTION

*It's just a graveyard - who'd be interested in that!* That's a comment we at the Glenravel Local History Project hear on a regular basis when it comes to our promotion of the history of Clifton Street Cemetery in the New Lodge area of North Belfast. The simple answer is thousands of people are interested. When you have a burying ground which contains the remains of the founder of the United Irishmen and therefore Irish Republicanism interred just a few feet from a prominent 19th century Unionist MP then interest is stirred. That's just one example. Others range from Catholics buried alongside Protestants, French soldiers close to American ambassadors, Prostitutes alongside Preachers, Rich laid to rest next to the Poor and throw in two of Ireland's largest Famine graves then it's a place you just have to go and see.

In 1991 the Glenravel Project began to conduct guided tours around this cemetery and on their very first tour a mere three people showed up. At that time the tours were once a year. In 2005 the tours are conducted on the last Saturday of each month to keep up with demand as more and more people wish to learn about the history of this cemetery and indeed Belfast. So that answers the question of who'd be interested in a graveyard but here's something for these people that ask such a question to think about. More people visit museums then attend premiership football matches and Clifton Street Cemetery is our open air museum!

This book will tell those interested everything they need to know about the cemetery from those with a passing interest in local history to the more serious researcher. It is a combination of different material brought together so that you do not have to go searching for it. For example the first part of the publication which gives the history of the Belfast Charitable Society and the New Burying Ground (the real name of Clifton Street Cemetery) is taken from R. W. M. Strain's excellent book *Belfast and its Charitable Society* which was published in 1959. Because we have done this there are those who may think that we are cheating by copying someone's previous material but all we would say is why re-invent the wheel. In other words why do a history of the burying ground when a brilliant one has already been written.

However the main task of this publication is to compile a full record of all the graves and those buried within them. This is done by using tombstone inscriptions from 1907 and cross referencing them with those of today. The list of those buried here is taken from the three large registry books for the cemetery but sadly these do not include those buried during the graveyards first 35 years as the registry books began later in 1831. All and all it is a fantastic historical reference and one which we know will be used in generations to come.

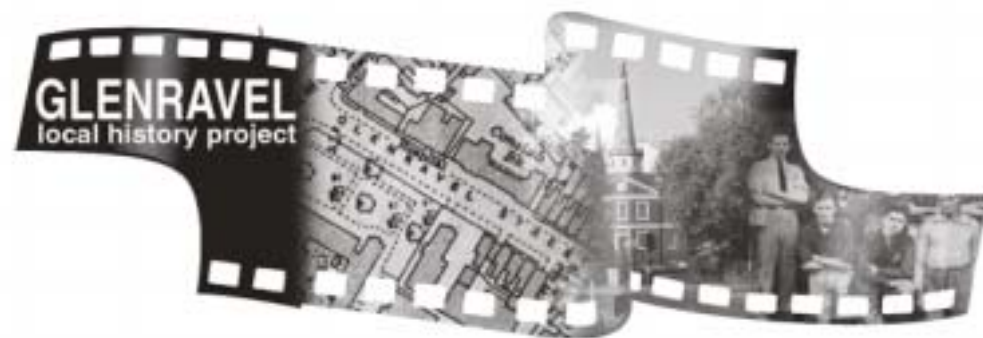
This task was compiled by the North Belfast based Glenravel Local History Project which was established in 1991 to promote the history of the cemetery and to work towards its restoration. In this field we have been quite successful and over the years we have worked alongside the Belfast City Council (present owners of the site) in the replacement of numerous gravestones and replanting schemes. When we were established our original name was the Clifton Street Cemetery Local History Project but we figured that that was just a little long so instead we replaced the graveyards name with Glenravel after a facing street. Glenravel Street was between the Poor House and the Burying Ground and although it contained quite a few buildings of historic interest it was completely wiped out to clear the way for the present Westlink Motorway.

There are a few people constantly working on this cemetery and people need to appreciate the dedication which brings them such a detailed record. Joe Baker, the Co-Ordinator of the Glenravel Project, has been responsible for the compiling of all the material and laying it out in such a presentable manner. Elaine Hogg, Robert Kerr, Beverley Armstrong and Liam Baker have also played major roles with Elaine compiling an internet timeline, Liam typing up the tombstone inscriptions and cross referencing them and Robert, Elaine and Beverley undertaking the un-fought-over task of compiling the registry information - all 14,000+ names! Mention must be made also to Andrew Brown of the councils Parks Department whose personal interest in the cemetery has helped us along tremendously. Naturally this could not be done without financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Some people think that schemes such as this are a waste of public money but if that's the case then do we deprive them of their interest? After all we must remember the comment above that more people visit sites such as this than attend premiership football matches so do we deprive these people of their interest by declaring that money given to sporting events is also a waste of public money - of course we don't!

The theme tune to a television comedy some years ago declared that *the world don't move to the beat of just one drum - what might be right for you may not be right for some*. This also goes to what we are interested in and while we have our various Sports channels on TV we also have our Education, Discovery and History channels.

Peoples interests need to be encouraged and our field is local history. After all, as Sir Richard Livingstone once declared:-

***There is perhaps no more fruitful form of education than to arouse the interest of a people in their own surroundings.***



**Heritage  
Lottery Fund**



# THE HISTORY OF THE BELFAST CHARITABLE SOCIETY

The Belfast Charitable Society is Belfast's oldest charitable foundation, and Clifton House is the oldest public building in the city still substantially in its original state. Its history is interesting, because it is in essence the history of the evolution of Belfast over the last two centuries. The original intention of the founders was to build a poorhouse and hospital. Once this was accomplished, they had to undertake many additional tasks which would otherwise have remained undone, for local government as it is understood today was largely ineffective. Then, during the Industrial Revolution, the population of Belfast increased very rapidly, and at the same time there was a general awakening of the public conscience to the fact that most of these people lived a wretched and precarious life. Under these two powerful stimuli other organisations appeared, both civic and philanthropic, on which devolved the many former duties of the Charitable Society, until today its sole responsibility, though one of its original ones, is the care of the aged and infirm.

### THE ORIGINAL CHARITY FUND BELFAST

From the moment he enters the front hall, no visitor to Clifton House can fail to remark the numerous wall panels inscribed with the names of those who, over a period of years, have contributed to funds for the needy. That above one of the two mantelpieces in the Boardroom is of special interest. Age and many coats of varnish have made it difficult to decipher, but it reads:

**GEORGE McCARTNTY, Esqr.,**  
*Sovereign of the Borough of Belfast and High Sheriff of the County of Antrim, A.D. 1680. This tablet was erected in his time as well for the general satisfaction of the friends of the donors as allso of others who hath or shall be charitably inclined to follow their good examples.*

The list of donors begins with the name of a former Sovereign of the town:

**Edward Holmes, burgess, dyed in June 1631 and left to the poor decayed inhabitants of Belfast 40 Lib.**

The list closes in 1759. This panel formerly hung in the old Parish Church at the foot of High Street, and is the tangible evidence of an attempt made to regularise the funds which had collected as the result of charitable bequests made from time to time. In Young's Town Book of Belfast the minute is quoted to which this Board owes its existence:

*Proposals made to Ye Sovereigne & Burgesses at a Court of Assembly held for ye Borrough of Bellfast ye 14th Octobr. 1680 to be debated and digested into By Laws Acts and Ordinances for ye good of the Corporacon.*

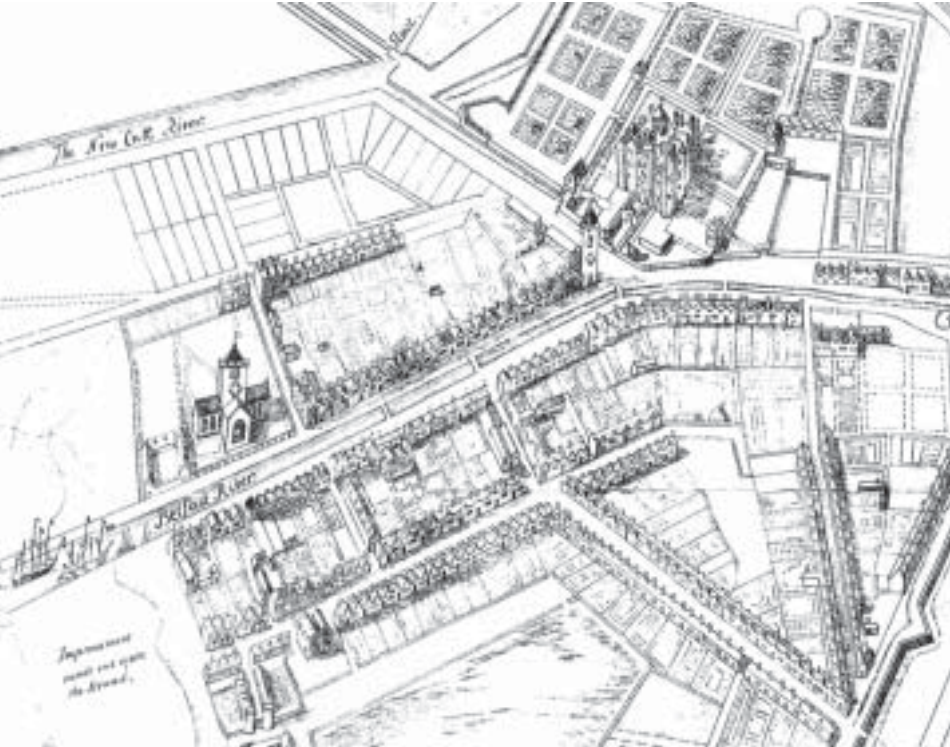
*1. That the Poores money be secured on Lands or in good hands and sutfet security to be passed by Indenture from Sovereigne to Sovereigne yearly; and the Table where ye benefactors for ye poore are incerted may be fairly drawne over and the Earle of Donegall's name may be entered in Lettrs of Gould with the sune blanke in its callume till ye 200 li left by his will be paid for ye use of the said poore and allsoe ye names of all other persons with their sumes may be entered that have given that others when they see what is left and soe well secured may be induced to ffollow their good example far ye; good of the decayed Inhabitants of this Carparacon. agreed on & to be don accordingly.*

Until two hundred years ago this appears to have been the only organised charity in the town.

### A POORHOUSE AND HOSPITAL

In the middle of the 18th century Belfast was a borough of same 8,500 inhabitants. From maps and illustrations of the time, it is possible to form some idea of the sort of place it was. High Street was the principal thoroughfare. The Farset River ran its open course down the lower part of the street, and sailing ships, their Masters living in Skipper Lane near by, could came up the river to take on or discharge cargo by the quayside. The Market House stood where Montague Burton's shop [Now Dunn’s Stores] is now, and the Donegall Arms, where many of the early meetings of the founders of the Society were held, was on the opposite side of the road. These premises were reconstructed in 1786, and are actually part of John Rabb's buildings today [Now Donegall Arcade]. The old Corporation Church at the foot of High Street, where St. George's Church is now, was small and falling into ruins. Dr. Pocock, afterwards Bishop of Ossory, passed through the place in 1752, and wrote:

*The town . . . consists of one long broad street and of several lanes in which the working people live. The Church seems to be an old tower or castle to which they have built so as to make it a Greek cross.*



Plan of High Street in 1685

A plan shows the principal streets. High Street was continued into the country as Mill Street and Barrack Street. Ann Street, then called Bridge Street, marked the south side of the town. North Street and Donegall Street, which was then called the New or Linenhall Street, both ran from Waring Street at the "Four Corners" to the Peter's Hill-Carrickfergus Road. Hercules Lane joined the top of High Street to North Street, and was not to become Royal Avenue until much more recent times. John Street connected this point with Linenhall Street. On the corner of North Street and John Street stood the George Inn. Here, on Friday, 28th August, 1752, Margetson Saunders, the Sovereign, and some of the residents of Belfast met

*to consider of a proper way to raise a sum for building a poor House & Hospital & a new Church in or near the Town of Belfast.*

There is evidently nothing new about financing an Irish hospital by means of a sweepstake, for it was

*Resolved, that 100,000 tickets be issued, at half a guinea each, the chances thereof to depend upon the drawing of the Dublin lottery now depending.*

Some of these tickets are still extant. This proved a bad means of raising money, and at a further meeting it was decided to take over another series of tickets in a State lottery in London. Accordingly, a notice appeared in the **Belfast News-Letter** of 6th July, 1753:

### BELFAST CHARITABLE SCHEME

*Whereas a Poorhouse and Hospital are greatly wanted in the Town of Belfast for the support of vast numbers of real objects of charity in this Parish, for the employment of idle beggars that crowd to it from all parts of the North, and for the reception of infirm and diseased poor; and whereas the Church of Belfast is old and ruinous and not large enough to contain the Parishioners, and to rebuild and enlarge the same would be an expense grievous and insupportable by the ordinary method of public cesses. Now, in order to raise a sum of money to carry these good works into execution, the following scheme hath been approved of by the principal inhabitants of said town and gentlemen of fortune in the neighbourhood who are desirous to promote so valuable an undertaking.-*

After this follows an outline of the new lottery scheme. In London, in the open market and in the coffee houses, the Belfast tickets which had been grafted on to the British State Lottery were not easily sold, and even in Belfast there was great difficulty in getting cash from those who had contracted to take tickets. The very characters of those managing the Scheme did not escape public criticism. A deputation was sent to London that winter to see what could be done. After about a month the deputation returned home, having made some £500 for the fund. By annual lotteries and other means, the money collected only very slowly, but at length, on Thursday, 17th January, 1767, there was a meeting of the Member, of the Belfast Charitable Scheme in the Donegall Arms, at which it was

*Unanimously Resolved*

*That the Sum of Sixteen hundred & fourteen pounds two Shillings and four pence half penny, which appears to be the amount of the Fund at Christmas, one thousand seven hundred & sixty six, or what other sum shall arise from the same, be applied to the building of a Poor House and Hospital, agreeable to the original Intention of the Scheme, on such Ground as Lord Donegall shall be pleased to grant for that purpose, in the Town of Belfast - And that the same shall be proceeded upon as soon as his Lordship's Pleasure shall be known.*

*Resolved*

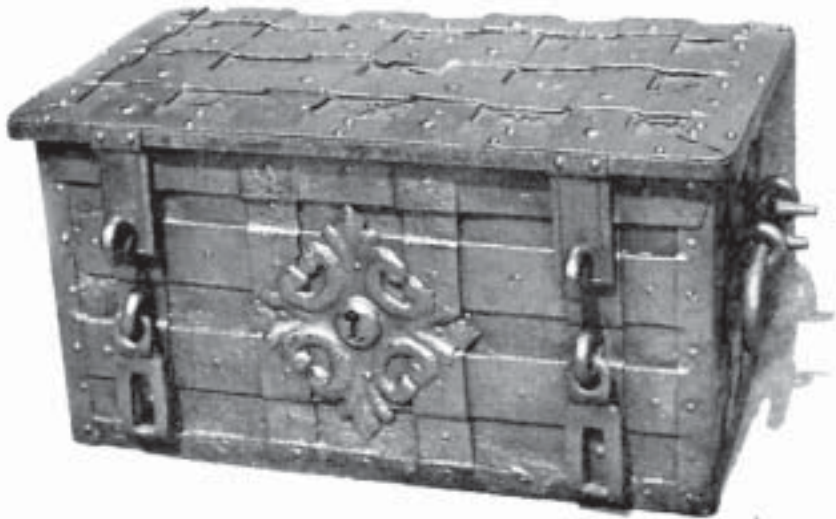
*That it is the opinion of this Board that the Ground on the North West side of the Road leading to Carrickfergus fronting the New Street is the most convenient Place for erecting the intended Buildings, and where they will be most ornamental to the Town of Belfast.*

*And it is the desire of this Board, That Mr. Saurin should acquaint Lord Donegall with their Sentiments, and that they request his Lordship to have the ground for the intended Buildings set apart as soon as can be conveniently done; for it will be impossible to begin them so early as Spring, 1768 unless clay be thrown up immediately for making Bricks the ensuing Summer; and it is expected that proper Clay will be found upon the Spot.*



In July of that year  
*His Lordship was pleased to approve of the same, & to be desirous to concur in the proper measures to carry them into execution.*  
At a meeting in the New Sugar House Office it is  
*Resolved that it would be very useful and proper to have a new iron chest for the use of the Society imported from Holland*  
to hold the assets of the consolidated fund and all the documents that are now fast collecting. The cost is to be £8. 17s. 6d. There is one of these so-called Spanish Armada Chests preserved in the building still but it is not three-locked, as the one from Holland was reported to be, and inside the lid on the elaborate grill protecting the mechanism of the lock there is inscribed,

*Wolffgang Abraham Otto in Nurnberg fecit*



This is more probably the original old chest, though it may be the new one, far with the addition of two padlocks, far which there are fasteners, it could be unlocked only with three separate keys, each in the possession of one of the specially appointed Key Carriers. One of these carriers is to be Henry Joy, and the chest is to be kept in his house.

There is a feeling that a new phase has opened. Funds and a site have been procured. Plans are under consideration. The old minute book is abandoned when only half used, and a new one is begun. Water is brought from Daniel Blow's field. Lime is purchased nearby. Mr. John Kennedy allows the lighters "Poly" and "Crab" to carry away sand and stones from his estate at Cultra free of charge. Sand is also fetched from the bank of the Lagan opposite Crummock. Bricks, as it was hoped, are being made an the spot. Stone comes from Whitehaven and Bally-castle, slates from Wales and the Highlands, timber from the Baltic.



*Left to Right - Arthur Chichester, 1st Marquis of Donegall. George Augustus, 2nd Marquis of Donegall and George Hamilton the 3rd Marquis of Donegall*

At last, in 1771, on 1st August,  
*being a day memorable for many glorious events to these nations,*  
the foundation stone was laid by Stewart Banks, the Sovereign of the town. His portrait, in the uniform of the Volunteers still exists.  
In the words of an inscription on copper placed within it,

**This Foundation Stone  
of a  
Poor House and Infirmary  
for the Benefit of The Poor Sick of the Town and Parish of  
Belfast  
was laid  
On the first day of August, A.D. MDCCLXXI  
And in the 11th year of the Reign of  
His Majesty George III.  
The Right Honourable  
Arthur, Earl of Donegall,  
and the  
Principal Inhabitants of Belfast,  
Founded this Charity  
And His Lordship granted to it,  
in Perpetuity Eight Acres of Land,  
on part of which this Building  
is Erected.**

The laying of this stone was destined to be the beginning of more than the mere fabric of the building. There is no record of the usual collection of representative objects being placed inside the stone, but five golden guineas were put on top of it for the benefit of the workmen.

Arthur Chichester, 5th Earl and 1st Marquis of Donegall whose name is remembered in the designation of many parts of Belfast, made himself financially responsible for the new Church of St. .Anne, which was built in 1777 on the site now occupied by the Cathedral. The bell from the old Church was hung in the tower of the new Poorhouse and Infirmary, and can be seen today suspended in a massive wooden frame in the entrance hall of the Institution . The bell is dated 1731, and is decorated on the outside with a raised ornamental band. It is still of beautiful tone, and can be rung by an inside tongue.

The Society soon sought statutory powers to enable it to carry out certain of its self-appointed tasks. In the Irish Parliament in 1773 legislation was passed to amend *An Act far Badging such Poor as shall be found unable to support them-selves by Labour; and otherwise providing for them; and for restraining such as shall be found able to support themselves by Labour and Industry. from begging.* *Whereas, says the new Act, a number of young and able bodied persons follow the several occupations of news-crying, cleaning shoes, and carrying baskets from the market, and are, in the intervals of such employment exposed to idleness and vice; and whereas such persons might more usefully be engaged in labour, and such employments might be executed by persons partially disabled, who must otherwise be taken into the house of industry; be it enacted . . . that any person following any of the said occupations in the county of the city of Dublin . . . without a licence . . . shall be deemed an idle person, and be liable to commitment as a vagabond.* There is a familiar ring about the phrase *persons partially disabled*, for legislation an their employment is not new.



*Bell from the old Parish Church now in Clifton House*

The Act continues:  
*and whereas the Town of Belfast in the County of Antrim is a populous and wealthy town, and the said town and parish thereof contains as many inhabitants as several of the cities or counties of towns in the Kingdom, but, not being a county within itself, cannot have the benetit of the said law in as ample and full a manner as is found necessary; and whereas the inhabitants of the said town and parish of Belfast have by voluntary subscriptions and contribution . . . erected a poorhouse and infirmary for the reception of the . . . poor and of sick persons . . . and the said inhabitants are desirous . . . that a body corporate should be formed, and to continue for ever, for the better carrying into execution under proper regulations the charitable and humane design of maintaining the poor of the said town and parish . . . be it enacted . . . that from and after the first day of June, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-four, the right honourable Arthur Earl of Donegall. James Lewis, the Sovereign of the said town of Belfast,. . . with others . . . `be called and distinguished by the name of the President and Assistants of the Belfast Charitable Society , . . It shall and may be lawful for the said President and Assistants to make such and the like Byelaws and Regulations . . . with respect to the poor and all idle and sturdy beggars . . . as the Corporations created by virtue of the said Act within counties at large, and counties of towns and cities are enabled to do.*  
Thus, from its earliest days, this Society, at all times a voluntary organisation sought and undertook responsibilities that would have authorities, had Belfast then been a city or county borough, almost as the governing body of the town. An Assistant was, subscribing one guinea or more annually to the Society.





*The old Market House (right) at the junction of High Street and Cornmarket*

When the House was first opened for inmates in 1774 accommodation was:

- 7 beds for the sick**
- 4 double beds for sturdy beggars**
- 22 double beds for the poor**
- 4 single beds for vagrants.**

These seven beds for the sick mark the beginning of Belfast's hospitals. At a meeting in the Market House in September of that year it had been *Resolved - That said seven Beds be fitted up immediately under the direction of the Faculty if they will be kind enough to give us their assistance.*

Here are the instructions for the preparation of the first of these beds:

*Resolved immediately to have one sick bed made in the following form: 4 posts 5 feet 10 inches high - 3: 3 wide - 6-3 long - a curtain at the Back and Foot to run on Rods - corded with fir ropes - A straw Matt - A Bed of fine sacking twilled and fitted with cut straw - Two single sheets - a single blanket, and a carpet for upper cover - The under Edge of the Bed side is to be 12 Inches above the floor.*

These beds were in the North Eastern part of the building, but there is no record of which room or rooms were used for the purpose. There is a note that *The Gentlemen of the Faculty of Physicians & Surgeons have generously resolved to attend the Sick Patients Gratis,*

and inside the front cover of the Minute Book started in 1774 there is this list:

*Physicians in order of rotation:*

- Dr. Seeds*
- Dr. Haliday*
- Dr. Mattear*
- Dr. Apsley*
- Dr. White*
- Dr. Stephenson*
- Dr. Moor*
- Dr. McDonnell*
- Dr. Bell*
- Dr. Wm. Halliday*

An Extern or out-patient department was established in 1776, which the poor could attend for advice and assistance on Tuesday's and Saturday's at 12 o'clock.

In 1786 it was

*Resolved that a letter shall be addressed to each of the Physicians in this Town, requesting that they will be pleased to convene a Meeting of the Gentlemen of the Faculty to Determine whether it may be agreeable to them to attend the Poorhouse in Rotation or be annually elected for that purpose.*

Thereafter annual appointments were made.

The need for much greater provision for the sick, especially for help in their own homes, was soon evident. Dr. Malcolm, in his delightful *History of the General Hospital*, published in 1851, when he was 32, suggests that many of the members of the Charitable Society saw their own limitations in relieving the sick, and that it was by them as much as anyone else that the need for a dispensary was first appreciated. The list of names in the prospectus of a General Dispensary for the Sick Poor issued in 1792 would bear out this idea. The authors of the prospectus, foremost among whom is the famous Dr. James McDonnell, emphasised the value of raising a fund

*for the relief of sick poor, of all descriptions, whether strangers or natives; that they may be supplied, AT THEIR OWN HABITATIONS, with such medicines, medical attendance and necessities of life, as may be fitted to the exigencies of their situations. It is presumed that such an institution would tend greatly to promote the interest of Society at large, and particularly of the Belfast Charitable Society, by decreasing the number of common beggars; since it is certain, that many complaints in themselves trivial, and admitting readily of cure, become confirmed by neglect, and the industrious artist, with his family, is speedily reduced to ruin.*

Among the first regulations adapted by the Dispensary was one which declared, *It is our determined purpose to co-operate with the Belfast Incorporated Charitable Society in every measure calculated to, promote its welfare.*

It was further resolved to invite members of the Charitable Society to attend a meeting to consider how far the two institutions should be united, and the best means of rendering their union conducive to the public good. The necessary rooms for the Dispensary were at first provided free of charge by the Charitable Society in the Poorhouse, and Malcolm records that in the early days the Surgeons were required to do the dispensing for the Physicians. At last, in 1797, under the heading *Memorabilia Annorum*, he notes,

*April 27 The first Hospital in Ireland for Fever, opened, with six beds in Factory Row, Belfast.*

This is the modern Berry Street. There was a further move to West Street at the opposite corner of Smithfield. In 1815, the foundation stone of a new hospital was laid in Frederick Street, formerly Brewery Lane, and the building was duly



**Berry Street in 1819**



**TOP: - The old General Hospital in Frederick Street which went on to become the Royal Victoria Hospital (BOTTOM)**

dedicated to the Sick and to the art of Medicine. This was to become the Belfast General Hospital, later the Royal Hospital, and the forerunner of the Royal Victoria Hospital. With its establishment, the Charitable Society was no longer entirely responsible for the admission of the sick, though it has always, as far as possible, taken care of those falling ill within its walls.

If the care of the needy was uppermost in the minds of the founders, responsibility for the strolling beggars was undertaken with equal thoroughness. A public advertisement of 1775 states,

*... , whosoever shall apprehend and bring to the House any such strolling beggars will be paid 5s. 5d, each after next Saturday.*

In 1776 it was resolved

*that the Standing Committee have a proper place fitted up as a black hole for confining delinquents and vagrants, and*

*that Mr. Brady do get the window of room pointed out to him built up for that purpose immediately.*

The window remains built up still.

Later it was suggested

*that a cart and ass patrol the town twice a week, attended by the Beadle and two of the ablest men in the House who shall have staves and cloaks to collect these beggars. A certificate signed by the 2nd Marquis of Donegall authorising the Beadle to apprehend vagrants is preserved. It is signed with the Society's seal bearing the inscription,*

***He that giveth to the Poor lendeth to the Lord***

The Beadle and his men were popularly known as the Bang-Beggars, and wore a



distinguishing uniform with scarlet collars on their coats. No doubt they had other work to do with their ass and cart, for an Act of Parliament of 1800 declared that *in case any hog, sow, boar, or pig, or other swine shall at any time . . . be found straying or wandering in any street lane or place within the said town of Belfast or precincts thereof, it shall and may be lawful to . . . cause the same to be seized, or in case the same cannot conveniently be taken alive, to be killed . . . and be taken by the Belfast Charitable Society for the use and benefit of the poor therein.* The townsfolk had once the supreme delight of seeing the Sovereign of Belfast, in person, shoot two pigs found running about the streets. The badging of beggars seems to have continued for some years. There are badges extant for the Parish of Shankill, but none issued by the Charitable Society seems to have survived. Some of those badged had their badges and licences taken from them afterwards, and they were made a fortnightly allowance by the Society instead. For example:

Grace Sheals, Barracks Street,  
4 young children 2/2  
Catherine Gillespy, Millfield.  
77 years. and one grandchild 1/1  
Rose Proctor. Long Lane, 75  
Grandchild, falling fits 1/7

Malcolm states that in the year 1795 Outdoor relief was afforded to 136 poor families by this Charity. Or the badged poor might be brought into the House instead, for instance.

John Muligan Mass Lane. 75 years old wife to shift for self  
Mary Boyd, North Street. 81years,  
single, doating,

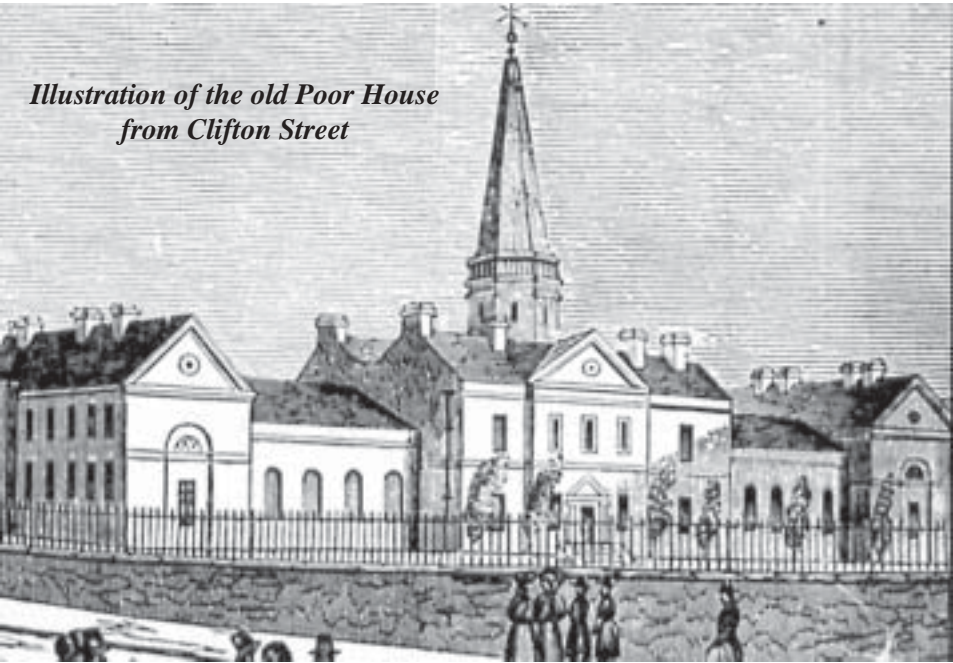
All this activity did not escape general notice and in the ***Belfast Newsletter*** of 27th July. 1804, there appeared this paragraph:  
*The public are much indebted to the Rev. Mr. Bristow and the other gentlemen of the Committee of the Belfast Charitable Society for their exertions to free them from the host of beggars who daily besiege their doors. Several of these gentlemen perambulated the streets on Saturday last, attended by the Black Cart, when a number of mendicants were seized and conveyed to the Poorhouse. The public have been told of the healing powers of metalic tractors, but we hesitate not to say that the Black Cart of Belfast is a more powerful agent for the cure of diseases than all the tractors that ever were invented. The very sight of it gave vigour to the infirm, and the lame became so fleet that their most ardent pursuers were completely outdistanced. They seemed nearly to adopt the sentiment of the poet:*

***He that begs and runs away***

***May hope to beg another day***

***But he that's by the Black Cart ta'en Can never hope to beg again***

The reply given to an inquiring architect.  
*that the Poorhouse is not intended for the reception of children, but of aged and infirm persons,*  
shows that it was a change from the original policy when in 17/76 it was resolved *That a number of poor children . . be taken into the Poorhouse., to be educated and supported*  
and  
*that the boys and girls who at present infest the streets be first taken in.*  
A Master and Mistress were appointed  
*for the government and instruction of poor children,*  
and in addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, industrial pursuits such as spinning and knitting were taught. Children of the poor outside the House could also attend. Of the masters who ruled over this school, the most remarkable was David Boyd, who, in 1806, published a pamphlet in verse entitled “The Belfast poor House, and Historical and Descriptive Poem.” He describes the foundation of the building and recounts the day-to-day work that went on in it:



***With hastily strides I enter the great hall  
The grand capacious rendezvous for all  
The gen’ral board, call’d always once a year  
First meet, converse, and walk together here  
Here too, on Saturday’s, poor persons stand  
With cheering hope, waiting the kind command  
Of the Committee who review with care  
Their doleful tale, and grant their humble pray’r  
For all who wish admittance here to gain  
Bring signed petitions, and their wish obtain***

He also relates what was done whenever the funds of the Society run low:

***So when the Poor-House stock wears out by chance  
The worthy Treasurer pays in advance  
One pithy sermon on a Notic’d day  
Produces plenty ev’ry debt to pay!***

and there is on record on donation of £1,000 given anonymously in the Church collection following such a Charity Sermon for the benefit of the House. After he left the Poorhouse Boyd ran a school of his own in Long Lane. and, eventually he appears in the Belfast Almanac of 1836 as "Rev. D. Boyd. School-Master” His poem may not reach great literary heights, but it is full of interesting detail about the history of the Poorhouse A quaint sketch of the building by his colleague, Mr Gordon, the first resident engineer to the House, forms the frontispiece. The Society in its earlier days could admit and Confine lunatics in the lower rooms. Some grim details are to be found in the reports of the Orderly, an office still held weekly by each of the Committee in turn.

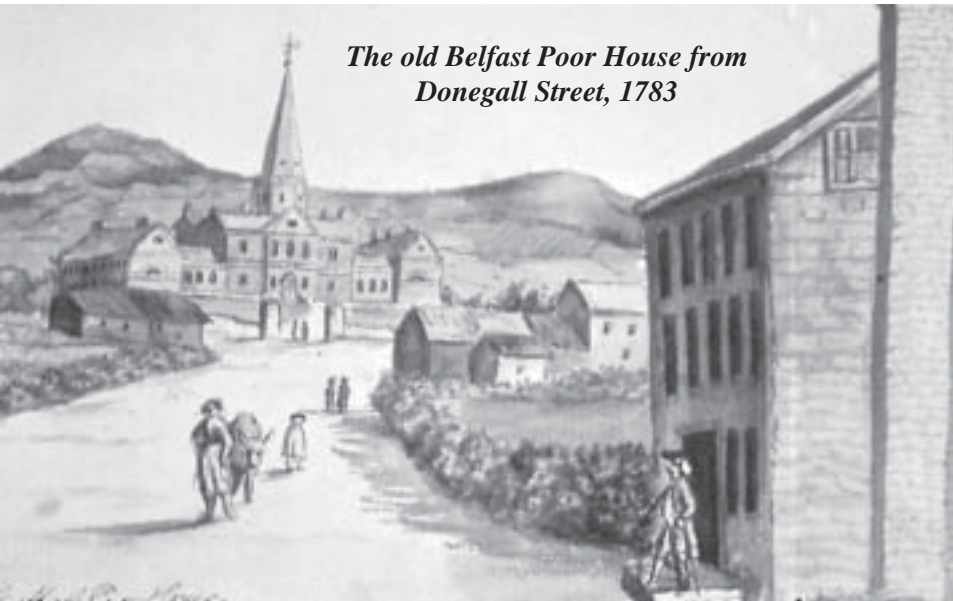
Sunday. May 15th  
*Was informed that Elizabeth Grey, who was admitted on Saturday the 7th, had got over the rafters of the room where she was confined, and ran down to the gate but was brought back. and has since been chained, which I confirmed finding she had been so violent.*  
Monday, May 10th  
*I did not like to come up owing to the the coldness of the weather.*  
And from a different orderly.  
*The woman confined in the steeple appears to be in full mental powers, and she is brought down for the present.*  
Another entry reads:  
*Admitted a lunatic woman who had been put ashore from a ship near Whitehouse.*

Further extracts from the orderly book show the general work of the place at the time:  
*Wednesday evening gave an order for the admittance of Catherine Wall into the House, a poor woman, a cripple. I was well informed that she slept on her barrow in the public streets for the 3 preceding nights.*

And again:  
*I think the little girls are in want of a small table to eat their meat of, they taking it off the ground.*  
There was a half-moon Sheraton table in the front hall, much shortened in the legs, and some chairs similarly treated, and it may be that these were the result of this suggestion.  
*On Thursday ordered a coffin for the child of the Bellman Irwin that was killed by a cart in North Street, and on Friday a coffin far the unfortunate man that hanged himself in John Street, and on the same day I directed the admission to the hospital of William Leonard, an American Sailor, as will be seen by his petition. I also directed the readmission of Mary Cunningham, who had run away from her apprenticeship, until the Committee should determine respecting her, but I understand she has eloped from this also.*

If anyone wanted to leave the House even for a few hours, the permission of the Orderly had to be obtained. This was a frequent cause of trouble.  
*Sunday All the poor except Widow Ross and Mary Bryson returned in proper time, the former did not return until half after five but sober and the latter not till six o'clock & very drunk.*  
*Monday ordered Mary Bryson to be fed on bread & water; till ordered other-wise, for her bad behaviour yesterday.*  
and then, as if to mitigate this severity,  
*Tuesday Distributed snuff and Tobacco as usual.*  
This distribution of snuff and tobacco by the Orderly occurred quite regularly as did the distribution of soap by the Ladies' Committee.

The Poorhouse stood at the north-west corner of Belfast. Spread out below it to the right lay the town, with a straight view down Donegall Street to the thatched cottages in Waring Street where the Commercial Buildings, now the Northern Whig building were to be erected in 1820. Facing the Poorhouse were the cottages of Fishers' Row, which was then the main road to Carrickfergus, and had not yet attained the dignity of being called North Queen Street. There was no main road nearer the shore. From the gate of the Poorhouse, Brewery Lane, now Frederick Street, ran down to the Lough where the men's boats lay. To the north of this were

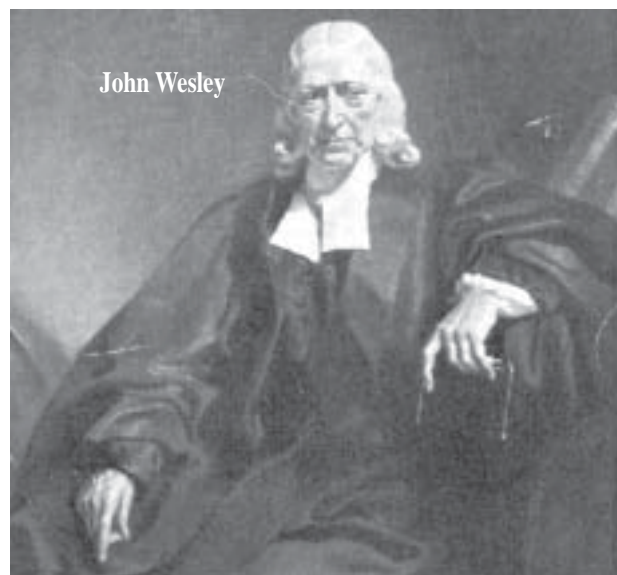




open meadows. There was no Crumlin Road or Antrim Road as those are understood today, and traffic out of the town in that direction passed through the Parish of Shankill. The Farset river ran through the Mill Field to its culvert, as it does still, but was, no doubt, a cleaner and more cheerful sight than the dreary and forgotten stream of today.

On 9th June, 1778, John Wesley was able to write in his Journal:

*Thence we went to Belfast, the largest town in Ulster. . . . The streets are well laid out; are broad, straight, and well built. The Poorhouse stands on an eminence, fronting the main street, and having a beautiful prospect on every side, over the whole country. The old men, the old women, the male and female children are all employed according to their strength, and all their apartments are airy, sweet, and clean, equal to anything of the kind I have seen in England.*



Had the great Evangelist looked from the Boardroom windows just two months earlier, he would have had more stirring events to report in his Journal, for off shore, and within full view if visibility permitted, the American Privateer **Ranger**, under the command of the famous Paul Jones, was bombarding Carrickfergus Castle. The British sloop **Drake** attacked him, but he retaliated to such good effect that the British ship had eventually to strike her colours. Such was one of the first naval victories of the United States of America.

The Society took its full share in the general activities of the town in those days. A notice in the **Belfast News-Letter** of 24th June, 1785, reads:

"Mrs. Siddons having, unsolicited, generously proposed and chosen a Play for the benefit of the Charitable Institution of this Town, we are authorised to inform the Public that, in consequence thereof, on Monday next (27th) will be performed the celebrated tragedy of Macbeth.

Part of Lady Macbeth/Mrs. Siddon. Tickets to be had from the Sovereign, Mr. Greg, Mr. Cunningham, and the Printers hereof."

The playhouse was then in Rosemary Lane, and Mrs. Siddons visited Belfast on two further occasions, and on each she gave a charity performance for the benefit of the Society.

Nor were social events in the House left lacking.

*Resolved, says a minute, that there shall be a Ball in the Poorhouse for the benefit of the House, on Wednesday next, being the 17th inst., and that the tickets be two and two pence . . . N.B. The Ball will be held in the new large Committee Room, now elegantly furnished.*

On this, and many such occasions, the music was provided by the band of the Antrim Volunteer Company. These Volunteers used to drill in the Poorhouse grounds, and on occasions of review were actually billeted on the premises, for those were the days of constant fear of invasion by the French.

It was within the memory of many that in 1760 a French squadron under Thurot had landed at Carrickfergus, and had captured and held the place for several days. They departed on the approach of the Volunteers, but their ships were met and defeated by the British Navy. This was only the beginning of the Institution's Military career. In 1798, the premises were requisitioned at forty-eight hours notice by the regular Army. It was only in 1802, when the Society had petitioned the Lord-Lieutenant-General asking either for the return of the premises with compensation, or their purchase by the Government, that the Committee met once more in the Poorhouse. During the 1939 - 1945 War the premises were again requisitioned, and were occupied by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The old Black Hole, the former dread of the vagrant, was used as an armoury, while the front lawn became a balloon site.

The history of several other organisations in the town touches that of the Charitable Society, and to record all these affairs in chronological order is quite impossible.

An interesting letter was received by the Committee in 1792:

*The Memorial of the Belfast Reading Society to the Committee of the Belfast Incorporated Charitable Society humbly Sheweth- THAT your Memorialists have gone to much expense in purchasing a Collection of Book:, and have formed a Society for the promotion of useful knowledge in this town and neighbourhood. That they are at present at a great loss for a proper place in which to deposit their books so as to render them of general use to the Society.*

*They therefore request that your Committee will recommend to the General Board of your Institution that the room known as the Ball Room shall be granted to your Memorialists for the reception and use of their Library until they can otherwise provide for themselves, and the Memoria-lists shall entertain a due sense of gratitude and respect.*

They complied with this request

*on condition that the Reading Society pay an annual rent to this Charity of Five Guineas so long as they occupy the room.*

Such is part of the early history of the Belfast Library and Society for Promoting Knowledge, founded in 1788, and better known today as the Linenhall Library. It is rather an anti-climax to have to record that the books and other property were never moved to the Poorhouse Ball Room, as it was considered that the premises were not sufficiently central.

In 1793, the Curate of St. Anne's, the Rev. John Clark, and Mrs. McTier, a sister of Dr. William Drennan, founded the Humane Female Society for the Relief of Lying-in Women. They applied to the Charitable Society for the use of the large centre room as a maternity ward, but the Board's Minute of 7th January, 1794, records that

*Messrs. Aspley, McTier and Sampson having reported that the House is in general full save the Ball Room which has only six beds in it, and Several of the rooms too crowded, it was unanimously*

*Resolved that a Respectful Negative be given to the application from the Ladies of the Humane Society.*

The Lying-in Hospital was first established in No. 25 Donegall Street, a house still in existence as business premises at the entrance to Exchange Court. This accommodation was very poor, and the Ladies were granted a building site, on that part of the new Antrim Road now known as Clifton Street, by the Charitable Society free of rent, provided the site was used for no other purpose. When the Medical School opened, the need for providing clinical material and instruction arose, and the Ladies, considering that this lay outside the original scope of the agreement, handed the Hospital back to the Charitable Society, who restored it to them once more at a rent of 2/6 per annum provided that the original purpose was not exceeded. It was, of course, inevitable that eventually students would attend the practice of the Hospital, and there was a good deal of unpleasantness between



**TOP: - The Belfast Lying In Hospital from an old midwife certificate.**  
**BOTTOM: - The building later became the offices of Millar & Co., and was destroyed by the IRA in 1922.**

the Ladies and their Medical Staff, and between the Lying-in Hospital and the Society. The Society took the view that the teaching of obstetrics was a money-making business and raised the rent, stating that *they have no wish to make a profit out of the Hospital, but will not allow others to do so.*

The trouble once started between the two institutions was destined on various pretexts to last for many years. Only in 1902 does the annual report state that *The negotiations with the Maternity Hospital have been brought to an amicable conclusion, and the Committee are able to report that both the Society and the Hospital are satisfied with what has been arranged.*

The Maternity Hospital in Townsend Street was opened in 1904, and was the predecessor of the Royal Maternity Hospital.

Other institutions have been tenants of the Charitable Society.

One of the earliest leases of this kind was to the body now known as the Ulster Society for Promoting the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, who, in 1835, opened their first residential school in premises in College Street on a site owned by the Charitable Society. Afterwards this building was known as the Engineers' Hall, and is was later occupied by Messrs. Bell and Hull.

In 1865, Dr. H. S. Purdon founded a dispensary for the treatment of diseases of the skin in Academy Street, and thanks to a bequest from Edward Benn this was replaced by the Belfast Hospital for Diseases of the Skin in 1875 on ground in Glenravel Street owned by the Society. Glenravel was the site of the iron ore





*The old Belfast High School, Glenravel Street*

deposits in County Antrim owned by the Benn family. This Hospital was completely destroyed by enemy action in 1941, when the late Dr. Allworthy, Physician to the Hospital and a Consultant to the Charitable Society, narrowly escaped with his life, having been previously bombed out of his own house. Next door to that site, and also on the Society's land stood the Benn Ulster Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, built and endowed by Edward Benn in 1874. It is incidental to the story of the Charitable Society that the Benn family also founded the Samaritan Hospital.

Glenravel Street was the site of the Belfast High School, formerly the Mercantile Academy. The Rev. John Pyper opened his Academy in Eglinton Street in 1854 in a building of which the air raids of 1941 have left no trace. Before it moved to its Glenravel Street site the school was conducted for a time in the house on the corner of Donegall Street and North Queen Street.

At the close of the eighteenth century there seemed to be no civic or philanthropic duty that could not be expected of the Charitable Society, though some of these extra tasks were suggested as a means of making the institution more fully self-supporting.

It was at one time proposed to the Committee that they should undertake, in part, the cleansing of the streets, but they "were unanimously of the opinion that it would not be eligible for the Charitable Society to establish any cart or carts for that purpose."

That such a proposal was ever seriously made, and it was made by no less a person than the Rev. William Bristow, Sovereign of the Town, shows how important was the part played by the Poorhouse in the growing community. for he hoped by this means to supplement the Society's income. Nevertheless, it did take on two peculiar tasks that were to have the most significant consequences: the training of apprentices to the cotton trade, and the supply of water to the town.

At one time the linen industry was in serious difficulties, for lack of capital prevented it from competing with the more efficient manufacture of cotton in England. Nicholas Grimshaw suggested in a Memorial to the Society that the children in the House should be trained for this purpose, and in 1799

*A proposal is made by R. Joy and T. McCabe to employ a large number of children in the Poorhouse in the cotton manufacture, at such rates as their respective services shall be deserving of ...*

*The said McCabe and Joy have, at considerable expense in money and attention procured various machinery useful in this business, as well for carding and spinning as weaving, in the best and most expeditious manner, their intention being to introduce a particular species of this manufacture into this place after the mode and with all the advantages that are so effectually practised in England ...*

*The places for the above purposes are now vacant, which are the three rooms on the north-east wing of the cellar story.*

In February, 1780,

*It is with great pleasure that your Committee remarks to you the probable advantages that may in a few years accrue to the community at large from having so many children instructed in the different branches of the cotton manufacture, and they are of opinion that this consideration is of much more importance than that of any profit that should arise to the House from their industry.*

This was a true forecast, as the result of this training, cotton soon became of far greater importance in Ulster than linen, and eventually, so great were the profits from cotton, that the linen industry was rejuvenated with the fresh capital and machinery it had so badly needed. And those who were to make their fortunes in this renaissance did not forget the Poorhouse, as the Charters Wing of the building proves.



*The Charters Wing*

Thomas McCabe and Robert Joy, who made the proposal about this cotton venture in support of Nicholas Grimshaw's memorial, were two very remarkable members of the Society's Committee.

Thomas McCabe was a watch maker in North Street, who prospered and bought a small estate called Vicinage behind the Poorhouse, where St Malachy's College now stands. On one occasion in 1786 in the Assemble Rooms he was asked to join in a scheme to float a slave ship company. His answer was

***May God wither the hand and consign the name to eternal infamy of the man who will sign that document.***

And so the scheme fell through. Dr McCabe, who was at one time Physician to the Poorhouse, was his grandson.

The Joys were the proprietors of the Belfast News Letter, and had a paper mill at Cromac, a fact recalled by the existence of Joy Street. Robert Joy, who owned a cotton mill, was the uncle of Mary Ann and Henry Joy McCracken. When she was over 90 years of age, Miss McCracken wrote of her uncle:

*He projected our 'Old Poorhouse', the first in Belfast, for a shelter for the poor . . . My uncle Robert paid his last visit to it, when unable to walk, in a sedan chair.*

**TOP: The Skin Hospital, Glenravel Street, destroyed during the 1941 Blitz**  
**BOTTOM: The Benn Hospital, Clifton Street/Glenravel Street**



*From its erection, as long as health was spared him, it had been his constant study to promote the comfort of the inmates in every respect. The husband and wife were not separated, but had curtains round their bed; and he studied to give them variety of food, and in various ways to promote an increase to the means of support, one of which was a shower bath, and anyone by paying one guinea a year, might use it whenever they wished.*

The Charitable Society has never taken any more surprising responsibility on its shoulders than the supply of water to Belfast. In 1678 George McCartney, that same Sovereign of the town whose name is on the old subscription list from the former Corporation Church, raised a voluntary fund to bring water into the town in wooden pipes. This supply was augmented in 1733 by the lease of other springs and rivers to William Johnston of Newforge, afterwards known as "Pipewater Johnston." By 1795 the growth of the town and the inadequacy of the supply created an opportunity which the Poorhouse seized of securing a lease of various springs from the Marquis of Donegall. The chief of these were the Bellows Springs at Fountainville, and springs "in a marshed Ground between Belfast and what is called the Strand Mill" To these was added Lyster's spring, near Deramore, so that there was a continuous piped system through Stranmillis by way of the Botanic Gardens to Donegall Pass, and thence to Cromac where the water was discharged into a reservoir near where Adelaide Street enters Ormeau Avenue today. The scheme had only been in operation two years when the Water Committee reported to the General Board

*that the revenue now arising from the new supply (exclusive of the produce of the two Water Carts), even in this early stage of the business, is more than sufficient to defray the interest of the money expended and borrowed, and that they have every reason to believe it will, in the end, prove a valuable and permanent Fund for the support of the Poor*

The supply was considerably increased, and more pipes, at first elm but afterwards metal, were laid down to conduct water to the streets and houses. Sections of these wooden pipes are still preserved. An Act of Parliament was necessary in 1800 before those being supplied with this water could be compelled to pay a water rate.

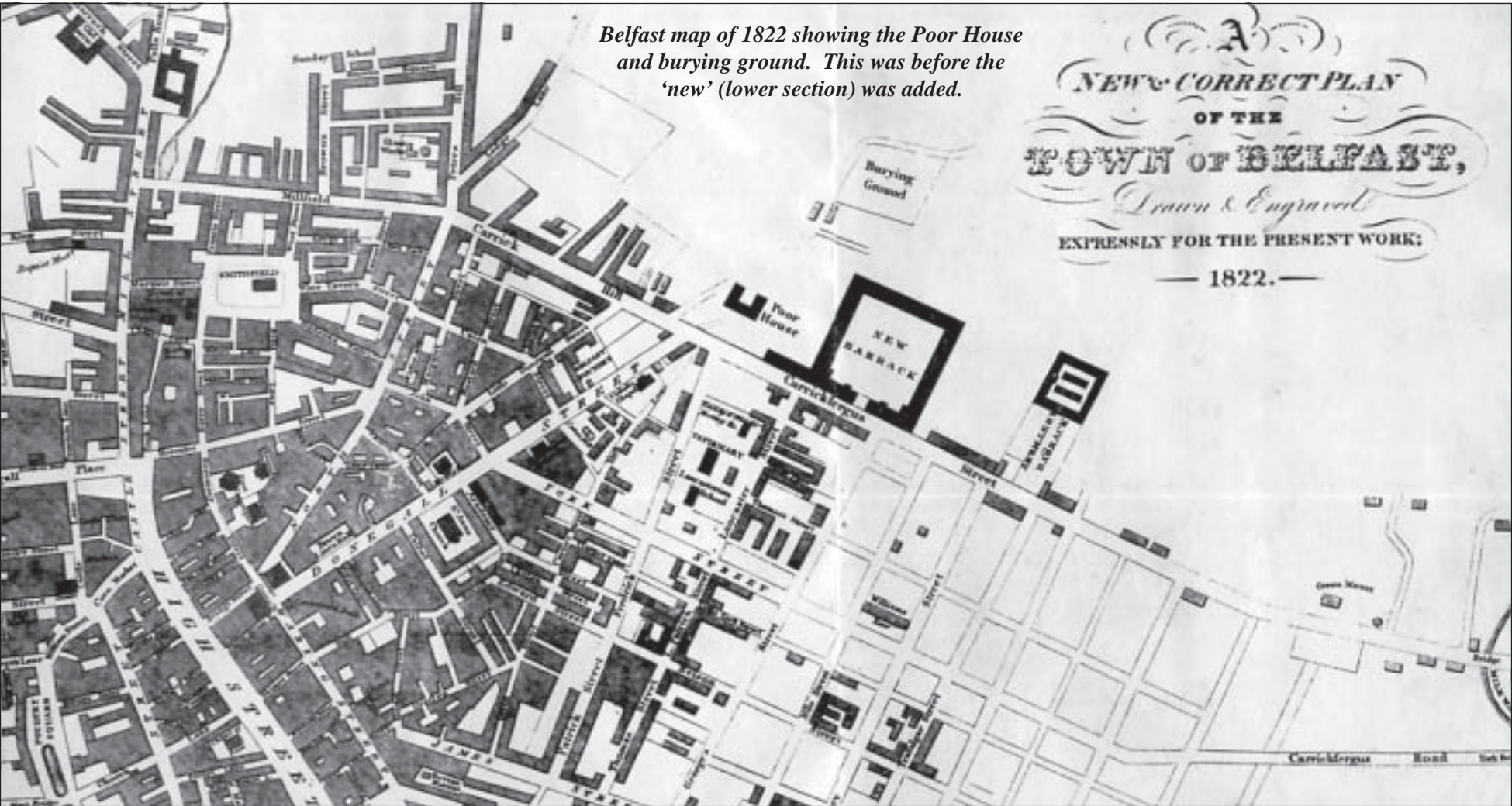
A picturesque clause reflects the Belfast of the time:

*It shall and may be lawful for the president and assistants of the said Belfast Charitable Society . . . to make arrangement . . . with all brewers, malsters, distillers, sugar-bakers, tanners, skimmers, dyers, butchers, and slaughterers, inn-keepers, or any other description of persons, tradesmen, or manufacturers who have any extraordinary consumption of water for a sufficient quantity of water according to their respective consumption.*

By 1817 a further Act of Parliament was necessary. The supply of water to a rapidly growing town was becoming more and more a matter for a special authority, and therefore Spring Water Commissioners for this sole purpose were to be appointed by the Society. In view of the large amount of their money invested in the scheme, the Charity was to be paid an income, fixed within certain limits, by these Commissioners who really formed a special sub-committee. This arrangement stood until 1840, when yet another Act of Parliament set up an independent Water Board. It is still the right of the Belfast Charitable Society to receive an annual income of £800 and free water from the Commissioners.

There were other ways in which the Society tried to make itself financially self-supporting.

At first certain conditions in the Grant, under which the surplus land was held from Lord Donegall, made it impracticable to create commercial sub-leases. but an Act of Parliament eventually made it possible to make sub-letting, for a reasonable length of time, so that in this way there was established a permanent but unfortunately, fixed income. In 1785, when the Ballast Corporation, the forerunner of the present Harbour Board, was created by Act of Parliament, it was enacted that all profits were to go to the Charitable Society. As events proved, the Ballast



Board never had any working profits, but the tradition established has proved a firm sentimental bond, and the Society has on several occasions, received considerable gifts from the Harbour Commissioners.

The work of the House itself in what may be called the Poorhouse phase is best summed up by a statement that appears for the first time in the annual report of 1827.

*This Charity."* it says, *"is appropriated to the maintenance of aged and infirm poor, and the education of neglected or deserted children. . . . The children are apprenticed as soon as they are tolerably instructed in reading, and writing, and arithmetic.*

In the Clifton House today there is one of the original Indentures of Apprenticeship. It reads:

*Harriet Martin, with her own consent and with the consent of the President and Assistants of the Belfast Charitable Society, doth put herself apprentice to Mr. Samuel Nelson, to learn the business of a servant and to sew, and with him (after the manner of an apprentice) to dwell and to serve from the date hereof until the full term of seven years . . . during which term the said apprentice her said master faithfully shall serve, his secrets keep, his lawful commands everywhere gladly do. Hurt to her said master she shall not do, cause or procure to be done of others. She shall not haunt nor use taverns, ale-houses or play-houses, nor absent herself from her lawful said master's service day or night unlawfully.*

The report continues:

*All the men's, boys', women's. and girls' woollen clothes, with all the sheets, shirts and shifts of men, women and children, and flannels for the hospitals, are made and mended in the house. The shoes are in part made and all of them mended by pauper. A quantity of shirting is woven from yarn spun in the house by the women and girls, and the washing for such a family is sufficient to occupy a number of*

*active hands. The Housemaid's business is done by one woman, with the assistance of a few of the girls. The slating and masonry is done by the inmates when practicable. All the jobbing and the making of a great number of coffins for the inmates, for extern poor, and for the fever hospital, amounting this year to 336 coffins, are done by house carpenters, who are paupers. The garden - which supplies abundance of vegetables, and of which a surplus was sold which exceeded the cost for seed and manure - is laboured and weeded by the men and boys. The work of the graveyard and the saving of hay are done by some of the old men. In that year there were 200 aged and 203 young in the House, a figure that was to rise in 1839 to 238 aged and 242 young, 480 in all.*

**THE BELFAST CHARITABLE SOCIETY**

While the Poor Law Bill for Ireland was on it, way through the House of Commons at Westminster in 1838 the President and Assistants became apprehensive that under one of its clauses their property could be taken from them and transferred to the Commissioners to be appointed under the new law. They accordingly prepared a Petition for presentation to Parliament for the introduction of an excluding clause, emphasising the special circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Society and certain peculiar features such as leases to the Lying-In Hospital and the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the provision of a burying-ground in which plots were held by private individuals. Their Petition

*Humbly Sheweth That for the erection and support of the Poor-House . . . large sums of money were subscribed or bequeathed by various inhabitants of the town and others, under the full conviction, that their property, so subscribed or bequeathed, should remain inviolate under that management to which it had been confided, and which impression has been fully borne out by various Acts of Parliament.*



The Secretary for Ireland gave an assurance that the necessary clause would be inserted but when the time came, this was so modified as to raise doubts as to whether it would serve the purpose of the institution.

The Annual Report of 1841, however, states:

*It having been ascertained by the opinion of Council, that the New Poor Law does not interfere with the Belfast Charitable Society, the Committee turned their attention to the reduction of the number of inmates in the House, so as to make the expenditure not greater than the income of the Charity. To accomplish this, the Committee ceased admitting any more adults or children, while, at the same time, they reluctantly discharged from the house a number of adults, whose claims upon the Charity were the least strong and who were considered proper objects for the Work House.*

*As soon as the inmates in the House are so far reduced in number as to leave a surplus of income over the expenditure, your Committee would recommend the admission of individuals who are natives of the town or parish, who have not been reduced to poverty by their own bad conduct or dissipation, and who do not belong to that class that are admissible into the Work House, so that, in a few years, the house will become an asylum for persons who had seen better days, and for whom the Charity was originally founded.*

Although the Society had no longer to make provision for the pauper classes, the levy of a Poor Rate had an almost disastrous effect on its income, for people felt that once the State was making provision for the poor, there was no longer any need for voluntary effort. It was some years before the continuing need for the Charitable Society was realised by the public. With the coming of the Poor Law, the Poorhouse days were really over, and from that time on the House was more often referred to as the Charitable Institution, The wrought iron work over the gateway is not old, but belongs to this period, and was put up as stated in a Minute of November, 1892:

*For many years past the Institution has been very generally known as the 'Old Poor House,' and the Committee thought that if the place were called by its proper name, an objection raised by some to seek its shelter might be removed. Over each gate has been erected an ornamental design bearing the words 'Belfast Charitable Society, 1771'.*

This was a period of expansion, and the dreadful overcrowding was to occur no more. This was due, not so much to any increase in the Society's income, as to a number of special gifts. In utilising these gifts to the full, the Committee of those days seems to have lost nothing of the astuteness of their predecessors. for the report of 1862 records:

“In the report of last year it was stated that the late Lady Donegall had bequeathed an annuity to this Society of £100 annually, to commence after the payment of other objects, and to continue during the life of Lord Donegall. Under these circumstances, your Committee considered it expedient to insure the life of Lord Donegall for £500 and effected a policy for that amount."

It is pleasant to know that his Lordship survived for a further twenty-one years.

In 1868, the Charters Wing, the gift of Mr. John Charters, was opened at the rear of the original premises, and a few yards from it. This was allotted to the children, who were thenceforth segregated from the aged. Four years later, in 1872, the two Benn Wings, the gifts of Mr. Edward Benn, were built, and with additional corridors, welded the several parts into a convenient whole, very much increasing the roominess of the House. The old dining-room with its kitchens and sculleries was added in 1887.

The children did not occupy the Charters Wing long, for in 1879, a resolution was passed reserving the home for the aged and infirm exclusively. It is a curious coincidence that in this same year it was reported to the General Board, *Your Committee have been much gratified by the receipt of a letter from a young man, who was formerly maintained and educated in this Institution, enclosing a subscription of one guinea to the funds of the Society, and promising to contribute*



*a similar amount annually. The letter also conveyed his grateful acknowledgement of many obligations to this Charity.*

And the converse too has occurred. More than once in the history of the Society those who had been its Assistants in their days of prosperity have fallen on evil times, and have been offered and accepted the shelter of the House.

There is an interesting minute of November, 1892:

*A Deputation from the Board of Management of the Royal Hospital attended and the question of the purchase of this Institution and grounds for the purpose of the Hospital was discussed.*

*The Committee considered it would be a benefit to the town if such a sale were accomplished and agreed to recommend the Corporation to accept the sum of £35,450 for the House and grounds, and seven houses in North Queen Street, in all covering about 4 acres.*

These negotiations were never carried through for the new Royal Victoria Hospital was, in due course, built on the Grosvenor Road site.

THE BUILDING

The House is not the oldest public building in Belfast. That distinction belongs to the old Northern Bank at the foot of Donegall Street, formerly the Exchange. The Assembly Rooms, which saw the trial of Henry Joy McCracken, were on its first floor. Many of the early meetings of the Charitable Society were held here. It was built in 1769 by the first Marquis of Donegall at the "Four Corners," then one of the most important sites in Belfast, and the point from which all distances from the



town were measured, as could be seen from old mile-posts. The building has been so altered both inside and out as no longer fully to deserve the consideration that would otherwise be its historical due.

Clifton House is recognised as being one of the finest examples of Georgian architecture in Belfast. The additions to the back have in no way altered the front elevation. The building is not large, but is of the most beautiful proportions, while the mellow colour of the old brickwork and its most careful pointing are really lovely. It has been repeatedly stated that the central spire, which, the curious will be interested to know, is of Scottish stone, and cost £170 15s. Od., is a feature peculiar to Irish Georgian, and would be represented by a dome in the corresponding type of building in England.

It is not clear who was the architect. There were plans prepared by Mr. Myln of London and Mr. Haliday of Liverpool. A Scottish architect was also consulted for

*Robert Thomson reported that He had advice from his friends in Glasgow that they have settled with the Person who drew the Plans of the Poor House and Infirmary for three guineas, and that he hath no further charge on that acct, but said 3 guineas & 3/8 postage's.*

Messrs. George Russell, Stafford Wilson and Foot appear to have submitted plans in Belfast. A Committee of five was appointed to consider these, and rejected all but three. On these three they could form no collective opinion, and each made his own report. From these a delightful probability emerges. Robert Thompson said. *There is yet another Plan which hath not been submitted to us as a Committee and of which therefore I shall say no more than that I would wish it laid before Mr. Cooley also, I have seen it in the hands of Mr. Robt. Joy.*

William Baird. too, reported.

*I have seen a Plan for the above purposes in which in my Judgement I would prefer.*

And a third member, George Black wrote, *. . . some of my worthy Brethren . . . produced . . . Plans . . . And it is a pity they were not submitted to public Inspection particularly the drawing of a respectable Brother who I am sorry to say declined showing it, even to the Committee as a body . . . The front seems calculated as a public Edifice.*

Then the Committee *resolved that Mr. Robt. Joy be requested to take with him to Dublin the three plans now delivered in, & such other drawings as are now in his possession, and lay the same before Mr. Cooley, for his examination, with directions to choose out of those four the Plan which he shall most approve of . . .*



The Committee afterwards saw Robert Joy's plans and recommended their adoption to the General Board, a choice which was confirmed. In support of all this there is a paragraph in the poem of David Boyd, the schoolmaster:

*All labour'd freely in the bless'd employ,  
But the most active, Mr. Robert Joy;  
He took to Dublin with th'utmost respect.  
The various plans, the skilled architect  
Might one approve - the work of choosing past;  
His was the plan they voted best at last.  
Through the whole business still the active man  
Here stands the Poorhouse built on Robert's plan.*

In short, as Mary Ann McCracken said at the beginning of the letter about her uncle, *He projected our 'Old Poorhouse'*.

Perhaps this does not mean as much as might be thought at first sight, for long after the foundations were laid and the walls well up, the Committee were still watching every detail, and there are entries in the Minutes such as,

*Resolved that the pitch of the roof be forty degrees.*

*Resolved that the stacks of Chimneys be carried up from above the roof agreeable to the model now made.*

*Resolved that . . . the cupola be carried on this season agreeable to a model thereof made by Hugh Dunlap Carpenter . . .*

#### CLIFTON HOUSE

Up until its major development the Belfast Charitable Society provided a home for 144 aged men and women of good character who were natives of, or residents for some time in, Belfast. Under the terms of the Forster Green bequest of £10,000, a limited number of persons can be admitted from any part of the counties of Down and Antrim.

The name of the institution has been changed to Clifton House, and the residents use this address with greater freedom than the old one with its inevitable stigma. A candidate, once admitted, had a home for life. Unless better treatment could be provided elsewhere, residents taken ill in the House were nursed on the premises. or, if transferred for treatment to another institution, were sure of their place in Clifton House when they were fit to be moved, even if chronically sick. It was occasionally necessary to transfer permanently anti-social cases of insanity.

The advanced age and corresponding frailty of those who were seeking admission was a matter of some concern to the Committee, but as far as was possible with a small nursing staff, no deserving case was refused admission.

Residents had full liberty to come and go as they please within the limits of medical discretion, and were encouraged to take their holidays in the usual way if arrangements could be made for them.

The fit were accommodated in small rooms, mostly two-bedded. The less strong were in infirm wards where they could get breakfast in bed, but their other meals in the dining-room, while the most frail of all were, like the acutely ill, in the sick bay.

Each, resident contributed what he or she could to their upkeep, but no one was refused admission for lack of means. Various Local Welfare Committees also made a contribution to the maintenance of people for whom they would otherwise have to make provision. Finance, however, was not so often as formerly the real problem for the applicant. These old people had in many cases outlived their own generation. Many of them had been living alone, and show signs of neglect and lack of supervision. All welcomed the companionship of people of their own age in an atmosphere where the rate of living is more attuned to their physical strength.

Belfast may well be proud of its oldest charity. In their lovely old Georgian building known first as the Poorhouse, then as the Charitable Institution, and now as Clifton House, the President and Assistants of the Belfast Charitable Society have



always pursued the policy that would best serve the needs of the community from time to time.

The Society has, the Report of 1874 says, *an interesting and honourable history . . . It is a fine memorial of the men who laid the foundation of our local reputation and prosperity. Their honoured names could not have been inscribed on a worthier page of philanthropy.*

*And it may well be desired that their benevolence, animating the successive generations of our people, may secure for this Institution a lasting prosperity, and for many a weary spirit, shaken by the storms of life, a haven of repose.*

Clifton House itself was totally refurbished to provide sheltered accommodation for over seventy elderly people. This included accommodation for the independent elderly, and those elderly and disabled requiring a greater level of care. The new development at Clifton House in conjunction with the 24 hr nursing care,

specialist facilities for the elderly mentally infirm and outreach services at Clifton Nursing Home, forms *The Clifton Community*. Through this, the Belfast Charitable Society will be able to offer an unparalleled continuity of care to their elderly population as their caring needs change with time.

This integrated service provides a stable life style for older people, minimising many of the traumas associated with moving from one stage of caring to another.

The new 100 bed Clifton Nursing Home opened in the Spring of 2000 reflecting the highest quality building and design standards. In addition to a 40 bedroom specially designed unit for the elderly mentally infirm, the new home provides respite and day care services, and in the longer term, outreach services for the elderly in the community. The warm and welcoming family atmosphere of Clifton House has been carried over to the comfortable, homely and relaxed environment of the New Clifton Nursing Home at Carlisle Circus.



Aerial Photograph 1995  
1   Clifton Street Cemetery  
2   Clifton House





# THE NEW BURYING GROUND

Until well into the nineteenth century ships could come up into the Town Dock where the Farset River lay open in the lower part of High Street. Maps of the period show a large bay of the Lagan which, if it were there today, would fill Victoria Square and a wide area to the south of it. There was therefore tidal water on both sides of the spit of land on which stood the old Corporation church and its graveyard, the site where St. George's Church stands today. By 1777 the parish church was the church of St. Anne built by the Marquis of Donegall on the site of the present cathedral, but, in spite of these changes, people continued to use the old burying ground. A clause in the Act of Parliament of 1800 introduces yet another facet of the work of the Charitable Society: *Whereas the old church-yard or burying place in the said town of Belfast, is situated nearly in the centre of the said town, and by means of the encrease of population therein, the same has become insufficient for the purposes intended; and whereas the water from the sea occasionally over-flows the said yard, and the burying of dead bodies therein by the reason and means aforesaid, is become a public nuisance, for remedy whereof the later Marquis of Donegall granted a piece of ground above the poorhouses and infirmary of said town, but notwithstanding several dead bodies are from time to time buried and interred in the old burying ground, be it enacted therefore by the authority aforesaid, That from and immediately after the passing of this act, no dead bodies whatsoever shall be interred in the said old church-yard or burying ground, and that the sovereign of the said town for the time being, and every other magistrate of the said county of Antrim, who shall witness, or be informed of any such intended offence shall be, and lie and they are hereby authorised and required to prevent the same; and that every person who shall dig, or assist in digging any grave, for the purpose of interring any dead body within the said church-yard, shall forfeit the sum of five pounds; and every person by whose order, command, or procurement any such grave shall lie dug, shall forfeit the sum of twenty pounds for every such offence....*

The Society had for many years possessed its own burying ground, called the 'new' one to distinguish it from that in High Street, but for long one of the oldest in the city. It was for generations the fashionable cemetery. Here, in stone, are the names of those who shared in the political and professional life of the town, who created its shipbuilding and linen industries, its trades and commerce, and of those who, prompted by their love of Belfast, founded or worked for its various philanthropic organisations. Here, too, lie nameless generations of the town's humbler folk.

While the Act is no doubt correct as to the reasons why the old burying ground was abandoned, it is not so accurate about the origin of the new one. There is no evidence that the ground was given to the Charitable Society for that specific purpose, it was simply part of the land already granted to them for the needs of the charity. At a meeting of the General Board on 27 October 1795 it was “Resolved that it is recommended to the next General Board to consider of appropriating one of the fields up the lane for the purpose of a burying ground,” and the following month *Resolved that the field ... lately in the possession of the Rev. Mr. Bristow be enclosed in with a wall and appropriated for a burying ground, and the Committee are hereby empowered to lay it out and dispose of it in such manner as may appear most advantageous to the Society and at the same time ornamental....*

‘Up the lane’ meant up Buttles’ Loney, which ran along the south and west sides of the House and then continued to Vicinage, McCabe’s home. The graveyard was opened for the primary purpose of raising money. *Poor House, March 1797*

*The Public are informed that the Burying Ground near the Poor House is now ready, and that Messrs. Robert Stevenson, William Clark, and John Caldwell are appointed to agree with such persons as wish to take Lots.” It was only in April 1799 that it was*

*“Resolved that a portion of the Poor House Burial Ground be laid apart for interring such poor persons as may die not having funds for their interment in the same or some other Burial Ground, the same to be regulated by the Committee for the time being.*

There is no record of where the poor dying in the House had been buried up to that time, presumably in the graveyard of the parish church or at Shankill. The only definite reference to an early burial is made in 1776 when the Orderly noted, *Robert McCreery died this day & ordered him to be buried at Fryars Bush at the particular desire of his friends,*

a cemetery then outside the borough. It was obviously necessary to build a wall round the Society's graveyard, and this was done in stages as funds permitted, so that what had formerly been an open field, in that noisome state to which open fields near centres of population are usually reduced, became a more tidy and useful place.

The new burying ground [wrote Mrs. McTier to her brother in 1802] is at the back of the Poor House, nearly opposite to McCabe's. I wish the tomb-stone I put up was there. It is a neat place, well laid out and regular, like a garden. Many that day, particularly Dissenters, were choosing their resting place. To avoid fees the Corporation would not allow consecration.

When the Act of Parliament already mentioned forbade the burial of any further bodies in the old ground at the former Parish Church, the demand for sites in the new Burying Ground naturally became very great. By November 1819 the Society at its Annual Meeting adopted a report on the subject.

*The burial ground is already so full, as to call for the particular attention of the subscribers. The wall lots, in particular, are all disposed of, and, consequently, the graveyard must soon cease to be a source of accommodation to the public, and of emolument to the Charity, without considerable enlargement. It appears to your Committee, that, in the first place, the enclosure should be completed on the south-east side, so as to afford room for some additional wall lots, which are the most profitable; and that as soon as may be, the Charitable Corporation should get possession of the adjoining field, now in the occupation of Mr W. M'Clure. By the alteration of the road to the burial ground, a simple, but signal improvement has been made, partly at the expense of the Corporation, under the superintendence of certain members of the Committee....*

*Under the head of income, the Committee beg leave to remind the Board, and to inform the public, that, on account of the irregular and unbecoming manner in which funerals are conducted, they have, at a considerable expense, provided a handsome Shoulder Hearse, with plumes, &c. for the use of the town, whether the deceased are to be interred in their ground or elsewhere. It is for hire at 10s. with plumes, and 5s. without them.*

How the first field worked out financially is shown by a balance sheet published at that time: -

BURIAL GROUND.		
Gross receipts from 1798, including Hay from 1802		£2,097 8 1½
Deduct building of the wall	£250 0 0	
Walks, planting, labourer at hay	90 0 0	
Fec-simple of the ground (20 years purchase of £10 per annum)	200 0 0	549 0 0
Profit to this day		£1,548 8 1½
Lots not disposed of, 224 at 2 guineas		509 12 0
Total value at present, exclusive of 60 lots for the poor		£2,058 0 1½
Lots on the intended wall, 27 at present, rate 8 guineas		245 14 0
		£2,303 14 1½
Deduct for building the wall say		100 0 0
Value of the concern after building		£2,203 14 1½
N.B.	1. The value of the hay is £6 os. od. which will pay for keeping the wall, etc., in repair.	
	2. The remaining lots will not be disposed of as speedily as the former; in the meantime £100 must be spent on the wall before the funding commences.	
	3. We may expect to make as much of the second field, except Shankill be enlarged, or some other ground be opened; but there is no want of ground at present, supposing the wall to be built.	

Such was the view of the day on the sufficiency of the ground. It was only from 1831 that a register of the burials taking place was kept, and the figures shown in the three volumes of the register are approxaimately as follows, though how many persons were interred in the New Ground prior to that date is a matter of conjecture.

1831-1841	2640
1841-1864	5489
1865-	3101
	11,230

The interpretation of the causes of death given in these old registers would puzzle a modern medical statistician, for in addition to such pathological curiosities as *bowel hive* and *white beeling*, there are vague entities like *break up of constitution*, *complication of diseases* and *decay of nature*. It can only be hoped that the lady who died at the age of thirty-one of *bad treatment* was weighed down by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and that she did not succumb to malpractice at the hands of the Gentlemen of the Faculty.

Anatomy had been taught in the Faculty of Arts of the Academical Institution since 1818 when Dr. James L. Drummond, at one time medical officer to the Charitable Society, was appointed Professor of Anatomy and Physiology. In the session of 1835-6, by which time the Institution had achieved its Royal Charter, a medical school was opened, and Drummond, who had to take on botany as an additional subject, retained the Chairs of Anatomy and Physiology, and became the first President of the Faculty.



Dr James Drummond

Where there were anatomists there was the need for bodies, and the only subjects legally at the disposal of the schools were the corpses of criminals who had been hanged. Not only were these scarce, but the anatomists were not free from the vengeance of the friends of these departed ruffians. The legal supply was therefore augmented by those terrors of the time, the body-snatchers, or resurrectionists as they were called. It was not until 1828 that Edinburgh and the whole of the United Kingdom were shocked by the disclosures of the Burke and Hare murders, but already no graveyard in the country was considered safe.

Perhaps the committee of the Charitable Society felt that their graveyard was too well walled in or too close to the town to be vulnerable. Shankill was much further out, and so there was a clear need for the watchman's shelter there. At last, however, the dreaded event occurred; the Society's burying ground was raided. Strangely enough the orderly's report contains no reference to it, but what happened is plain from the immediate reaction to so awful an occurrence.

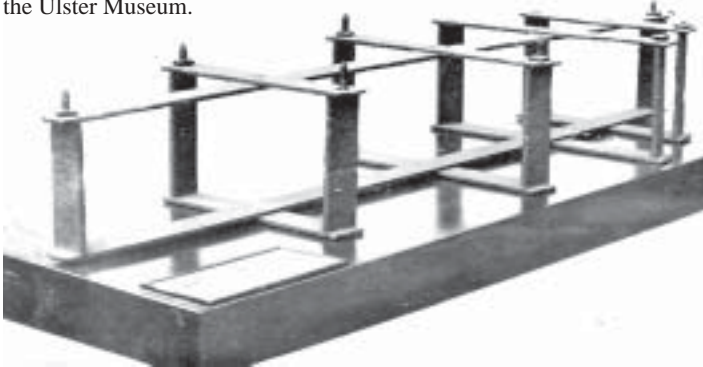
*Belfast News Letter* 20th January 1824:

## A REWARD OF FIFTY POUNDS

Is offered by the COMMITTEE of the BELFAST CHARITABLE SOCIETY, to any Person who shall, within Six Weeks, give information to the STEWARD against, and prosecute to conviction, the Person or Persons guilty of the atrocious offence of entering the Burying ground behind the Poor-House, on Monday Night, 12th inst. and raising an Infant's Coffin, several years interred. It remained unopened on the ground.



Many devices were used at that time to prevent raids. It was not uncommon for relatives to keep watch at night until such risk was removed by the onset of decomposition. Watchmen, too, were often employed by the relatives of the dead for this purpose. An apparatus to prevent the removal of a body from its coffin was found in the Clifton Street burying ground and presented to the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society by Dr. Richard Barnett in 1890. It is a guard or cage of stout iron in which the entire coffin was enclosed prior to interment. It is now within the Ulster Museum.



By the time the second field came into use for burials, it was usual to employ watchmen privately, but at length this gave rise to trouble, and in 1830 the Burying Ground committee would not allow the watchmen to take firearms into the ground by night. Headstones were being mutilated and other damage done, for the newer ground at that time was not completely walled in like the upper part, so it became necessary for those who employed watchmen to give a guarantee to the Society for their good conduct. It seems, however, that body-snatching was not the only irregularity that could occur in the graveyard under cover of night.

About a year later it was *Resolved That two confidential watchmen be engaged by the Committee to guard the graveyard, each watchman to provide security in ten pounds, and each person burying to pay ten shillings.*

*The Committee of the Belfast Charitable Society having, since the commencement of the present year, employed two watchmen to protect the remains of persons interred in their burying ground, are sorry to state that very few of the friends of the deceased have paid the trifling proportion of the expense that fall to their share. The consequence of this is that the Committee have not received one-half of the money expended by them, and as they have been encouraged in their efforts to prevent the bodies of the deceased from being disturbed by so small a proportion of those who have benefited by the measure, they are under the necessity of withdrawing the watchmen from Saturday next, the 15th inst. But they wish the public to understand that they cannot consent to allow the former method of individuals employing watchmen unauthorised by the Committee to be again resorted to. It was both inefficacious for the purpose, and productive of so much irregularity and immorality, that they would be totally unjustifiable in allowing it to be adopted again.*

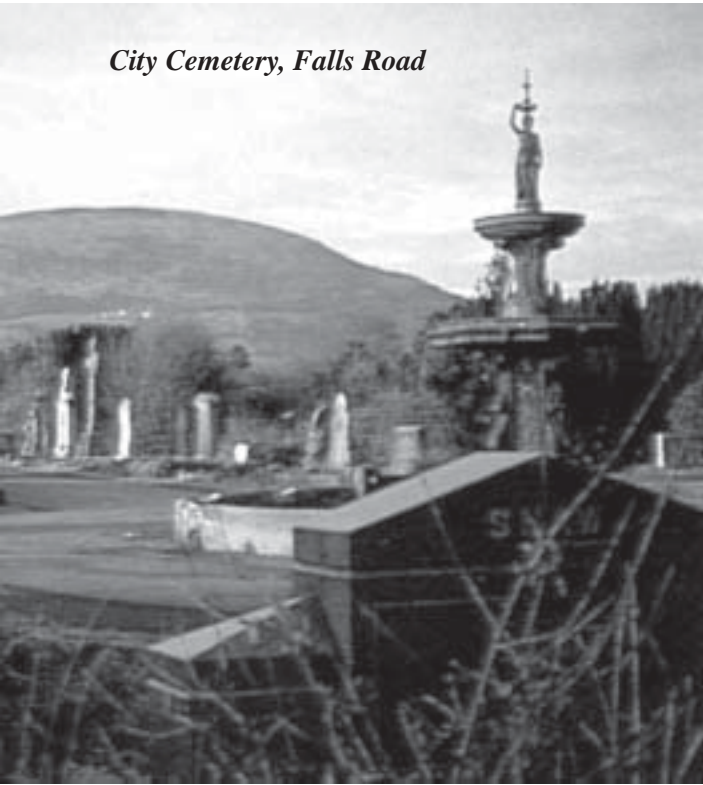
Only three months later, in January 1832 the Rev. Bruce, when Orderly, reported *what took place respecting a funeral*, and it appeared so important that a special meeting was called. It was then decided to engage four men on security who would be ready to act as watchmen when needed, the persons requiring their services to pay them at the rate of two shillings for each night's duty. Things went well for a short time. Then on 27th February there was cause for an investigation.



At a special meeting of the Committee held for the purpose of enquiring into the circumstances connected with firing shots in the graveyard on the night of Monday last, one of which struck the barrack, and entered through one of windows of the room in which the soldiers were sleeping. Two soldiers of the 80th Regiment deposed that at about half-past twelve on Monday night, the 25th inst., a shot was fired from the rear of the barracks, which entered through the centre pane of one of the windows, and that about two o'clock, four o'clock, and six o'clock the shots were repeated, but they do not think any of them struck the barracks. On the whole they are sure that about six shots were fired. After hearing the statement of the men who were on watch on Monday night; the 25th inst. - viz., John McIlwain and James M'Farlane - we are of opinion that John M'Ilwain and James M'Farlane fired several shots on Monday evening unnecessarily, thereby causing both alarm and danger, thereby acting contrary to their orders, and in consequence thereof the Committee dismiss them from their situation, and that a special meeting of the Committee be summoned for Saturday to take into consideration the propriety of not allowing firearms to the watchmen in future. The decision then reached was that the watchmen were to have blank ammunition only, and were to make a report each morning on handing over their arms. The old revolver and flintlock used in the burying ground are still preserved at at Clifton House. But the close of 1832 saw the resurrectionist's livelihood snatched from him by legislation, and there was to be greater peace in the New Burying Ground.



Dr. Drummond is permitted to have a single grave in the Paupers' ground for the interment of subjects granted to the Anatomical school according to the Act of Parliament. The committee still had troubles. There are endless records of drunken gravediggers, of legal squabbles over the ownership of plots purchased several generations back and claimed by more than one person, and of the transfer of plots never used to new hands. By 1836 the graveyard, now under the care of a sexton, was no longer a source of income, all the plots having been let. The Paupers' Ground, too, was declared to be full. Even the narrow space between the old west wall of the graveyard and the new wall built outside it when the Antrim Road was formed had been used as well. After consultation with the Medical Officer of Health the year 1882 marked the end of burying the inmates in the House's own ground, and a suitable site was provided in the City Cemetery.



Old or Upper Ground.      Platforms--Numbers.  
New or Lower Ground.      Platforms--Letters.

**Belfast Charitable Society.**

To the Caretaker of Clifton Street Graveyard.

**Prepare a Grave for**

Christian Name, \_\_\_\_\_

Surname, \_\_\_\_\_

Age, \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation, \_\_\_\_\_

Residence, \_\_\_\_\_

Cause of Death, \_\_\_\_\_

Native of \_\_\_\_\_

Full Description of Plot, \_\_\_\_\_

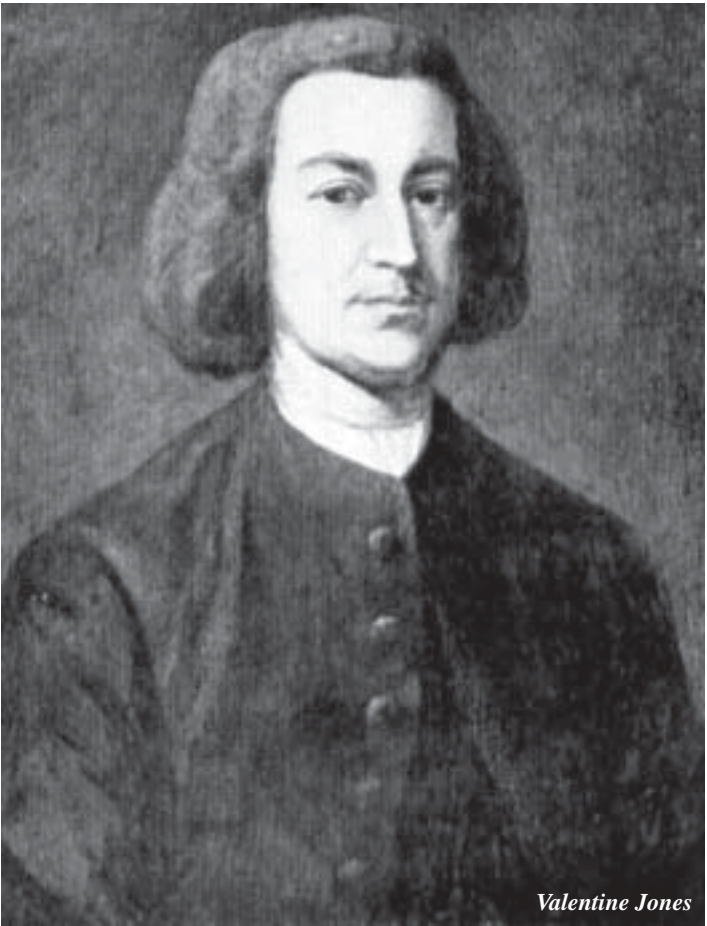
Upper or Lower Ground, \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Death, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Steward.

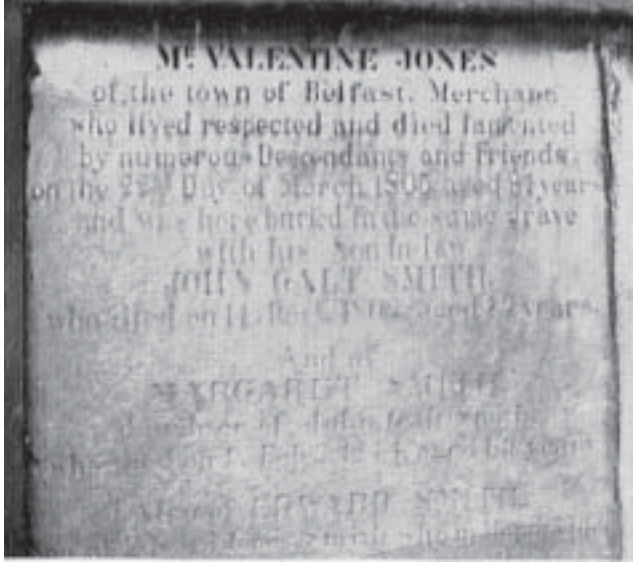
Above were interred this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 18\_\_\_\_

Now only those whose family ties entitle them to the privilege are laid to rest in the New Burying Ground. While there was never enough money to do all the things to the grave-yard that were proposed from time to time, a small outlay resulted in the planting of the trees and shrubs to be seen there today. This was largely carried out in 1874 through A. J. Macrory who was then Chairman of the Belfast Royal Botanic and Horticultural Company, Limited, and who was able to get expert advice about what should be done. Today the New Burying Ground seems sadly misnamed. It has the air of great age, and yet of serenity and peace. Those who travel down the Antrim Road can look into it from the tops of buses, and it presents a strangely isolated appearance behind its double wall. It seems to have no entrance, and to be, as in some ways it actually is, a little world apart. Its own heavy iron gate in Henry Place is quite inconspicuous. The two original fields are now completely laid out in plots with paths leading to the several platforms. In summer the sun filters down through the leaves of the trees to dapple the grass below. The person who wanders into the place in search of quiet, or to study the head-stones, may have only the birds for company. Most of the plots show considerable dilapidation, for many of the families they represent come to tend them no more. Some of the stones show the erosion of the years, and can be read with difficulty. For anyone interested in the history of Belfast this place is nevertheless a veritable Westminster Abbey in miniature. Here can be epitomised the history of the town from its beginnings as a place of industry. While it is private ground, anyone by asking can gain entrance, and in this small space can find some name that will conjure up a whole history in itself. Industry, philanthropy, medicine, politics, and the church - all are represented. It would be impossible to mention the many people of note buried here, but the stones and the monuments speak for themselves. Among the many worthies of the town who lie here, it is right to give pride of place to that West Indian Merchant, Valentine Jones 1st, who was at the inaugural meeting of the Charitable Society in the George Inn in 1752, and, having seen the society through all its growing pains, died at the advanced age of ninety-four, to be buried in the shadow of the building he had done so much to create. His biography is given by Bern in his second volume. He had wide business interests, and his premises filled almost the



whole of Winecellar Entry from Rosemary Lane to High Street. He was responsible for much of the development of the eastern side of Donegall Place, and lived and died in the house next to the old Imperial Hotel. It is recorded of him that on one occasion he took part in a quadrille in the Assembly Rooms, the other three men being his son Valentine Jones, his grandson Valentine Jones, and his great grandson Valentine Jones. He and his son will be remembered in connexion with a loan they made to the Society when money was needed to bring water to the town. The son-in-law of Valentine Jones 1st, was John Galt Smith, an early Treasurer of the Charitable Society. The inscription on the headstone reads:

Mr. Valentine Jones of the town of Belfast, Merchant who lived respected and died lamented by numerous Descendants and Friends on the 22nd Day of March, 1805, aged 94 years and was here buried in the same grave with his Son-in-law John Galt Smith who died on the 14th Decr., 1802, aged 72 years.



Valentine Jones was one of the founders of the General Dispensary, and a member of the Committee of the Reading Society. Beneath almost the highest point of the graveyard there lie the remains of many of that family who, perhaps more than any other, deserve the thanks

of this old society, the Joys. The great Robert and Henry of the foundation days had passed on before the burying ground was laid out. The first Joy to lie here is Henry, the son of that same Robert. He too served the committee for many years. The impression his orderly reports give is that of a highly intelligent and efficient man. His attitude to the water course passing through his land near the Blackstaff suggests a man who knew what he wanted, and was determined to get his way. He seemed to lack the humanity and humility of his father or his uncle, or the capacity to do the small personal service so characteristic of his cousin Mary Ann McCracken. There is no doubt of his ability. He was a proprietor of the NewsLetter until it was sold in 1795, and he ran the paper mills at Cromac. He found time for much literary work, and was a secretary and a president of the Belfast Literary Society. 'He was the only person whom we have ever known,' says Benn, 'who was really acquainted with the history of old Belfast.' Descendants of these Joys continued to serve the Society for many generations nearly to the present day. Almost the last inscription on the headstone reads:

**Alex Bruce Joy, 3rd Officer, W.R.N.S., Lost at Sea through enemy action, August, 1941.**

In the same row of headstones as that bearing the names of so many Joys, there is a small simple wedge-shaped block of red granite. It covers the remains of their kinswoman, Mary Ann McCracken, the niece of Robert and Henry Joy and the daughter of Captain John McCracken who threshed his crop in the front hall of the Poorhouse. As the inscription says, she 'wept by her brother's scaffold, 17th July, 1798'. Henry Joy McCracken was captured at the battle of Antrim, and after trial in the Belfast Exchange, was condemned for his part in the rising of the United Irishmen, and hanged from the Market House in High Street. Mary Ann McCracken lived a long and useful life in the service of the poor of Belfast, taking a keen interest in the Charitable Society which she had known from her childhood, and in the House of Industry. Her minutes probably reveal, as nothing else, the clear sightedness and determination of this most remarkable woman. Many years later a body was unearthed near the spot in the parish churchyard in High Street where Henry Joy McCracken had been buried. The people to whom the bones were brought believed them to be those of Henry Joy himself, and they were subsequently interred in the same grave as Mary Ann.



Close to her grave is the Haliday vault. It bears no name, but it shelters the remains of at least two distinguished men. Alexander Henry Haliday, M.D., was the son of a Presbyterian minister of Rosemary Street congregation, and was in his time one of the foremost physicians of Belfast. He was also a poet of some note, the composer of a tragedy, and the first President of the Reading Society, now the Linenhall Library. His name appears often in the records of the Poor House. In 1770 the Hearts of Steel, a secret society whose activities were directed mainly against absentee landlords, attempted to burn down the house of Waddell Cunningham who had arrested one of their number for maiming cattle. Dr. Haliday tried to restore peace, and finally went to the military barracks either to secure the release of the





*The Haliday Vault* (Photograph Tony Merrick)

prisoner or offer himself as a hostage. Fighting broke out at the barrack gates, but Haliday was able to persuade the military to stop firing. Benn quotes two extraordinary paragraphs in connexion with the Doctor's death in 1802. The first is part of a letter from Mrs. McTier to her brother, Dr. William Drennan.

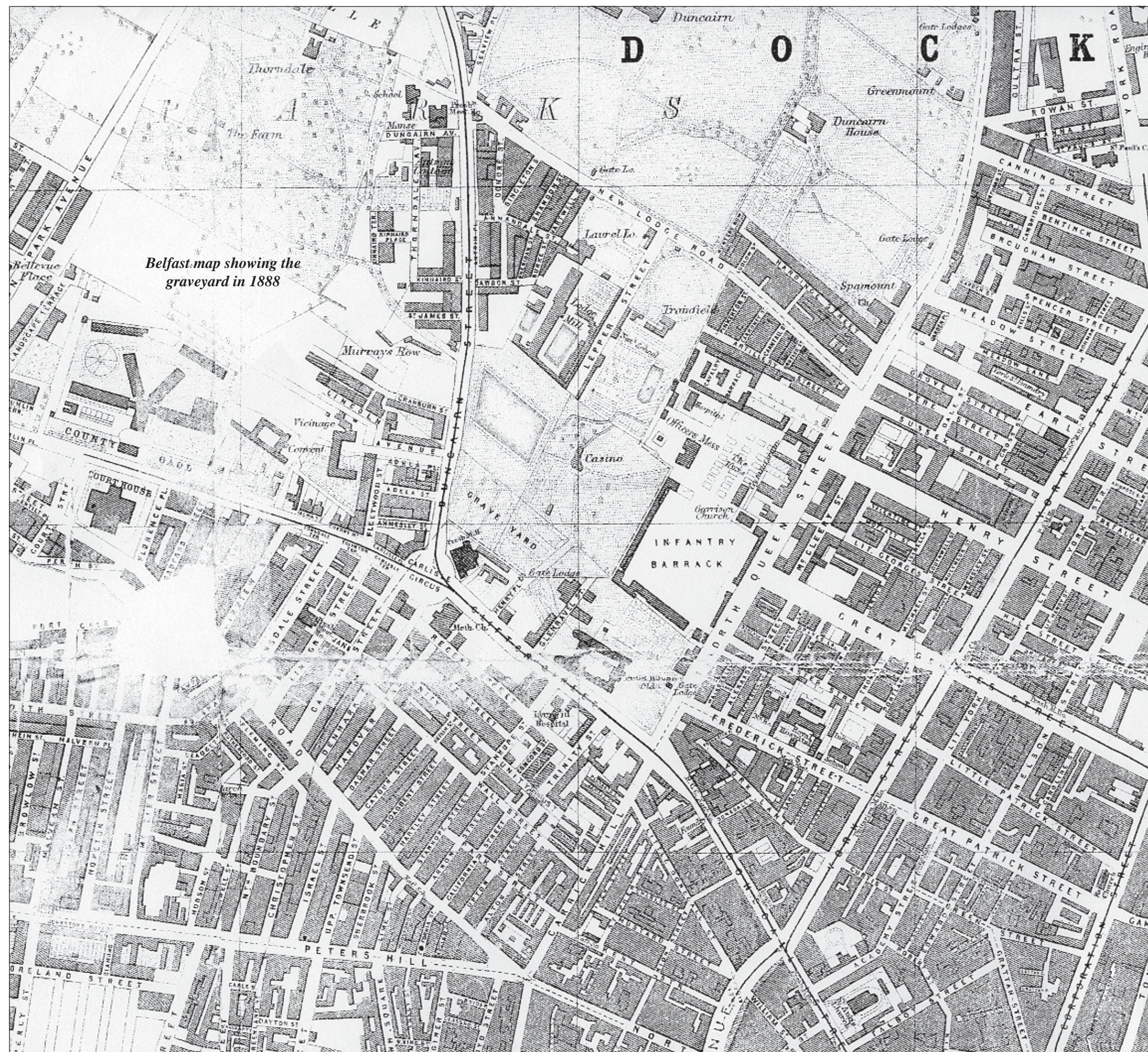
*You ask what religious aid Haliday had.... Three nights before he died Bruce and I played cards with him, & the very night that was his last he played out the rubber. Now, said he, the game is finished, and the last act near a close; blessed the departing guest and sent his love to her sister; was helped up to bed, comforted his wife, spoke of the blessing her sister and Wm. had been to them the last gloomy winter - and the rest you know.*



*The fighting at the Barrack Gate*

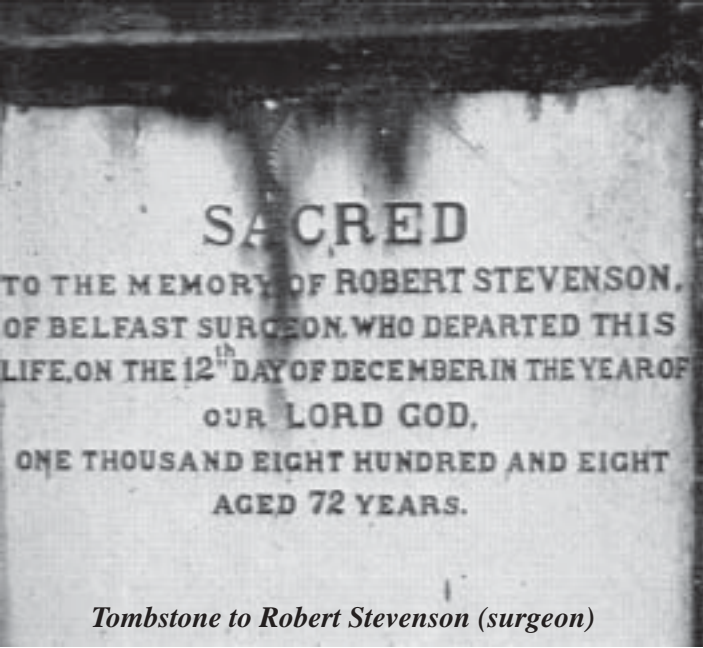
The other quotation is from his will, where after making considerable allowances to his wife, he adds,

*I leave her also a Legacy of £100 by way of atonement for the many unmerciful scolds I have thrown away upon her at the Whist Table; and I further bequeath to my said dear wife the sum of £500 in gratitude for her never having given on any other occasion from her early youth till this hour any just cause to rebuke or complain of her, and I further leave to my said dear wife a further sum of £100 as an acknowledgement of her goodness in devoting an hour or two every evening, which SHE COULD HAVE SO MUCH BETTER EMPLOYED, to amuse me with a game of Picket when we happened to be alone, after my decayed eyesight would no longer enable me to write or read much by candle light.*





In the same vault lies Doctor William Haliday, the nephew of Alexander Henry. A physician like his uncle, his name also appears on the list of those attending the Charitable Society. He had the family literary tastes, and was a president of the Reading Society. He, too, was a president of the Medical Society, and he and his uncle are now surrounded by their colleagues of those days. Close by lies Doctor John Mattear, brother of Samuel McTier, who died in 1806 at the age of seventy-nine. He also was one of the Society's physicians, and, like Doctor Haliday, was on the staff of the dispensary. Robert Stevenson, surgeon, lies near by.



For 26 years [says Malcolm] a most active and zealous member of the Committee of the Charitable Society to which he bequeathed the munificent sum of £1,000. There were several Stevensons or Stephensons connected with the Society at that time. It is of interest to note that Malcolm's reference is to 'Stephenson' while the headstone carrying the same date and style reads 'Stevenson'. One of the others was the Rev. Samuel Martin Stephenson,



Samuel Stephenson

M.D., a former Presbyterian minister of Greyabbey, who became the celebrated physician of the Fever Hospital and the Lying-in-Hospital, and who served on the committee of the Charitable Society during the troubled days of the water-supply dispute. The third was Joseph Stevenson, the secretary of the Academical Institution, and also for many years a member of the committee of the Charitable Society. All three were taking an active part in public affairs at one time, and it is often impossible from minutes to distinguish them. The Ulster Medical Society was formed in 1862 by the amalgamation of two older societies: the 'Belfast Medical Society' and the 'Belfast Clinical and Pathological Society'. The former was established in 1806 and consisted of the nineteen doctors then practising in Belfast. Its first president was Dr. Samuel Smith Thomson, and the rest of the committee were at one time or another connected with the Charitable Society.

*William Haliday  
William Drennan  
Robert M'Gee  
Robert M'Cluney  
Andrew Marshall*

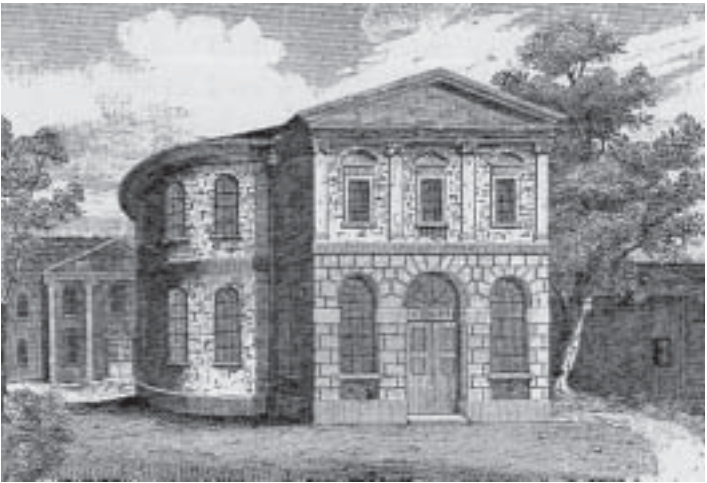
How lovingly Malcolm speaks of Dr. S. S. Thomson as the 'Father of the profession' in Belfast! He was a Consulting Physician to the General Hospital. He was closely associated with the foundation of the Anacreontic Society, now the 'Belfast Philharmonic Society', and was its president. After his death in 1849 he was buried in the Charitable Society's ground. Dr. William Haliday, just mentioned, was the Belfast Medical Society's second president.



Dr. Andrew Marshall

The third president was Dr. William Drennan, whose father succeeded Dr. Alexander Haliday's father as the minister of the first Presbyterian Church in Rosemary Street. William received his medical education at Edinburgh University, and it was from that city that he wrote home, *A student of medicine is a term of contempt, but an IRISH student of medicine is the very highest complication of disgrace.*

He practised for a time in both Newry and Dublin, but is better remembered for his political and literary activities, for he was a founder and a prominent member of the Society of United Irishmen. He did not approve of their later activities and drifted away from the movement he had done so much to establish when he discovered that his colleagues were determined to embark on schemes of violence. There is no doubt that he held strong political views. His address to the Volunteers led to his being brought to trial for 'a wicked and seditious libel' in 1794, but he was acquitted. 'He was,' wrote his granddaughter 'a reformer, but never a conspirator.' Today no one would be more surprised than he to



The First Presbyterian Church, Rosemary Street

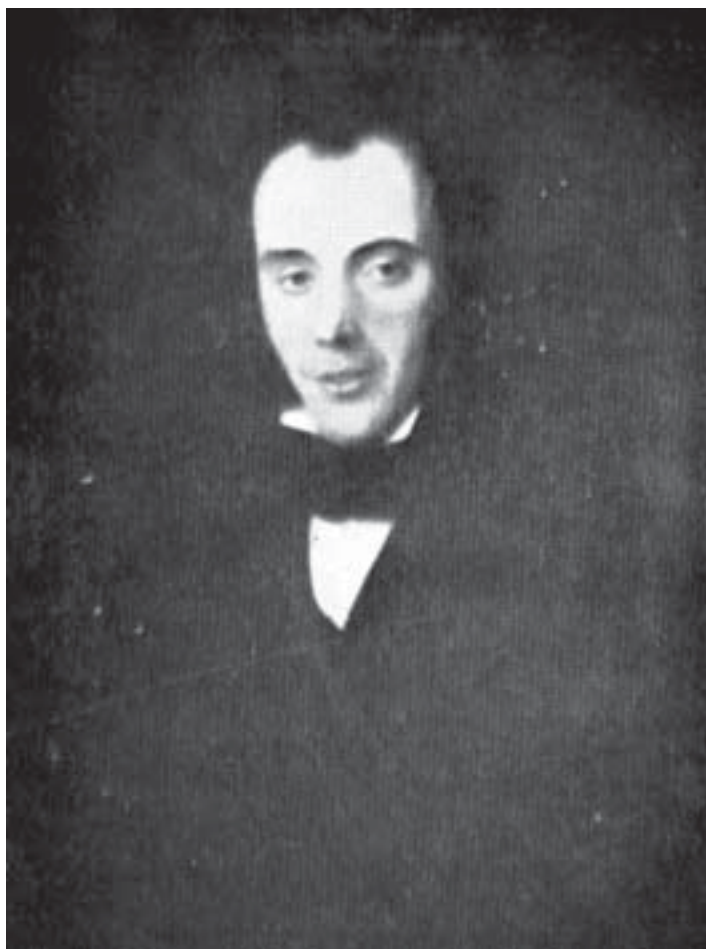


Dr. William Drennan

learn that his greatest monument is the mass of letters that passed between him and his sister, Martha, Mrs. Samuel McTier, and which, having been preserved almost intact, throws so much light on the social and political life of his time. He was never a physician to the Charitable Society, but his name is on record as having attended its meetings, and his suggestion about the scheme of inoculation against smallpox has been already mentioned. One of the founders of the Academical Institution, it was he who gave the inaugural address when it was first opened in 1814. He died in 1820, and in accordance with the instructions given on his deathbed, his funeral cortege stopped for a few minutes at the gate of the New College, the Academical Institution. He was interred in the Clifton Street Burying Ground, where his epitaph, written by his son, may still be read: *Pure just benign; thus filial love would trace The virtues hallowing this narrow place The Emerald Isle way grant a wider claim And link the Patriot with his Country's name.* For it was William Drennan who first called Ireland the Emerald Isle. Dr. Andrew Marshall was buried here in 1868 at the age of eighty-eight.

He was the first secretary and treasurer of the Medical Society and afterwards its president. He began his medical career as a naval surgeon, and served in the Baltic under Admiral Gambier in the operations that made Heligoland a British possession. He was later in partnership with his brother-in-law, Dr. James Drummond in High Street, and was surgeon to both the Charitable Society and the General Hospital. It is incidental to the story of the Clifton Street Burying Ground that the Belfast Medical Society later fell into a state of neglect, and that among those to whom it owed its revival were Dr. James McDonnell and Dr. Henry Forcade. James McDonnell, the physician from the Antrim Glens, is too well known to need further mention. Henry Forcade was a retired Army surgeon who had served all through the Peninsular campaign with the Duke of Wellington, and, as Malcolm says, 'so distinguished himself ... as to receive the old general's particular commendation'. He was the first treasurer of the revived society, and the founder of the annual feast in memory of its resuscitation. Henry Forcade was, like Andrew Marshall, surgeon to both the Charitable Society and the General Hospital. *Those who do their good works by spending money during their lifetime show truer philanthropy than those who wait till they can no longer take it with them.* Two such men, both to be remembered in honour in the history of this society, died within a short time of each other, and were laid to rest beside the institution which was one of those they had helped. Edward Bern died on 3 August 1874 at his home on the Antrim moors, and the News-Letter of 5th August records how he was held in the public opinion of the day. *We regret to announce the death of Edward Benn, Esq., who died at his residence, Glenravel House, on Monday. Mr. Benn's large contributions to charitable institutions in Belfast are well known. For many years his own life was little but suffering, and he considered the direction which his charities took the most effective for relieving the sufferings of others. Though only known to the generality of the inhabitants of Belfast by his contributions to charitable objects, his life, while able, was one of incessant activity. Nearly forty years ago he purchased the estate of Glenravel. It was then a poor, unimproved, unknown district. He built numerous houses, reclaimed land, made roads, planted on a considerable scale, and at great expenditure and labour did everything in his power to raise the character of the country agriculturally. He built a residence for himself, in which, with short intervals, he has ever since lived, and leaves at his death the country changed in all its features. It is now a busy, well known, and in many respects a rather handsome district, with much wealth and abundant employment. Mr. Benn was the first to introduce to public notice in a commercial way the rich iron ore of the County of Antrim. It was on his estate of Glenravel the very first ore of this kind was raised owing to his exertions, and from it there is still a larger quantity exported than from any other single property in the country. The county is indebted to him for the introduction of this industry, which is now acquiring such vast importance. Mr. Benn's habits were simple and inexpensive; but his broken health prevented him from visiting Belfast for many years past. He expressed a wish recently that his collection of Irish antiquities, said to be the largest in the possession of any individual in the North of Ireland, should be preserved for a museum in some institution in the town, which we hope will not be lost sight of. His family was connected with Belfast from the beginning of the present century, and, though long, a non-resident, he always fondly looked upon it as his native home, and was one of the many Belfast men whom for talent and usefulness the town has reason to remember with respect. Mr. Benn has left tangible proofs of his interest in the welfare of this town and its inhabitants. Among other tokens of this kind we point with gratifying pride to his munificence, out of which has been built two wings to that valuable institution administered by the Belfast Charitable Society; the splendid hospital for diseases of the eye, ear and throat; the Samaritan Hospital on the Lisburn Road; and kindred institutions, which will long preserve his memory and fame.* Though the name of Benn is still well known, it is remarkable how little information is available about the man himself. But in days when it is considered that Ulster has no significant natural resources of iron or coal it is a sobering thought that so many charitable bequests were the result of the development of the iron deposits of the Antrim plateau. A.J. Macrory wrote to Edward Bern's brother George, the celebrated historian of Belfast, to express the Society's sympathy on this sad occasion, and the reply is of more than passing interest. *My dear Sir, I beg to thank you for your very kind letter and through you to the Poor House Committee for the resolution in reference to my Brother. It was rather unfortunate that owing to his ill health for so many years and his distance from Belfast he was unable to assist in the carrying out of any of his Charitable projects. Indeed even in his strongest days I question if he could have done much in that way, his habits having been peculiarly retiring. Not having been in Belfast for seven years he of course never had even the*





**Edward Benn**

satisfaction of seeing the wings to the Poor House, and the adjoining hospital.

Some reflections have been made both in the public print and by individuals that so many institutions recently established by him and others in the town for special purposes, act adversely to the interests of the General Hospital. I really cannot say what truth, if any, there may be in this opinion. My Brother's idea was contrary. He imagined that a Number of Hospitals of this description would so far relieve the General Hospital of much of its burthen. He may have been mistaken, I sincerely trust the Hospitals will soon be built, and that a succession of good, zealous and skilful men will through long years to come arise to meet within their walls so far as their means will permit the claims of relief of the diseased and needy in Belfast.

I am &c. &c.  
GEORGE BENN.

George Benn gave his brother's portrait to the Charitable Society. and it hangs today on the main stairway.

The same minute that records this letter continues:

Resolved

That Mr. Macrory be requested to draw up a letter of condolence to the son of the late John Charters, Esq. Deceased.

Mr Charters [said the News-Letter of 15 August] -was a leading member of an honourable and enterprising class, whose sagacity in business helped to create and establish the commercial fame of Belfast. From an early period of his life he was connected with the flax spinning trade of Ulster, and at his demise he was at the head of one of the largest concerns in connection with that industry. Endowed with excellent business habits, he employed them to great personal and general advantage; and it is highly creditable to his memory to state that a large portion of his princely fortune was devoted to the promotion of the public welfare - in works of benevolence from which the poor will continue to derive benefit; and in extending education to the humbler classes of the community. In this latter respect his name will long be honourably mentioned in connection with the academical Institution, in whose various examinations his prizes hold a prominent place. Through his liberality many pupils of the Model School have been enabled to prepare for the Queen's Colleges and professional employment. In private life the deceased gentleman was much and deservedly esteemed by a large circle of friends. Politically, he was



**John Charters**

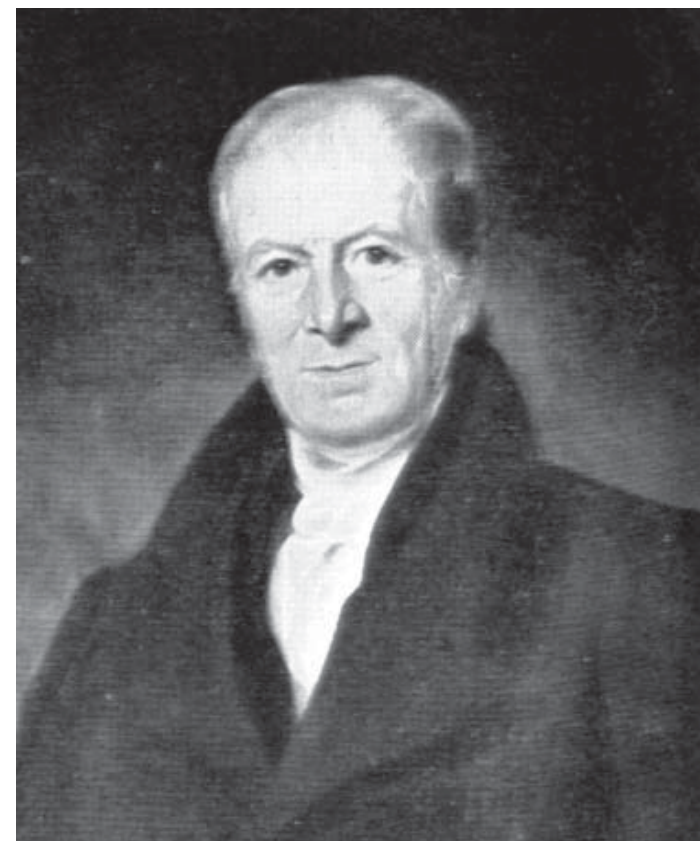


**A. J. Macrory**

through life a consistent Liberal; but he never obtruded his views offensively, and had little to do with party conflicts. Now, that he has passed from us, his name is spoken of with respect by all creeds and classes in Belfast.

The notice does not refer to the wing he built to the Poor House, and he, like that other great linen family the Mulhollands, built a wing to the General Hospital. The names of Charters and Mulholland are both still associated with wards in the present Royal Victoria Hospital. Perhaps, in making these benefactions, John Charters recalled the old days when the cotton manufacture of the Poor House brought about the rebirth of an industrialised linen industry.

Of those who did much to establish Belfast as a great industrial centre, few can take a higher place than William Ritchie the ship-builder, yet his own headstone in the Charitable Society's graveyard seems to be his only memorial. He came from Scotland in 1791 and founded his shipyard on a site now covered by Corporation Square. He also built a graving dock for the Corporation which he completed in 1800. It is still in existence, lying just to the north of the Harbour Commissioners' Office, and is known as the No.1 Clarendon Graving Dock. He was a member of the Academical



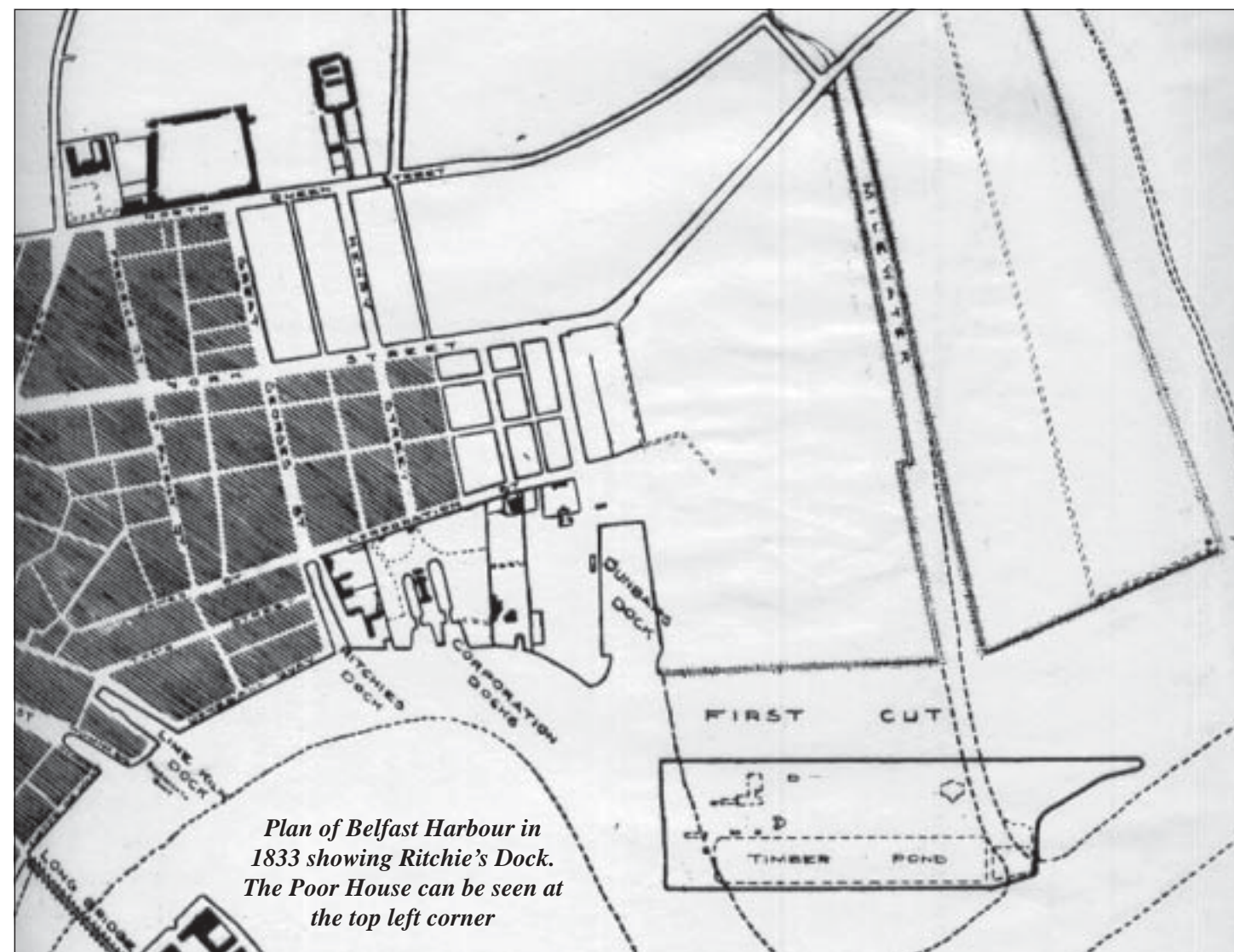
**William Ritchie**

Institution, and for a period was chairman of the committee of management of the General Hospital. He was on the committee of the Charitable Society, and it was he who made the suggestion, never acted on, that the now famous Cromac waters should be used to supply the town. When he died in 1834 it was recorded of him that

... there was no institution in Belfast of a public nature, whether literary, scientific or charitable which was not largely indebted to him for support. Many Belfast celebrities not having any special connexion with the Society are buried here, and it is only possible to mention a few. There is John Templeton of Cranmore. His old house gained considerable fame as a place where William III stopped on his way from Belfast to the Boyne, tethering his horse to the tree standing before its door. Templeton was born in 1766, and was a pupil of David Manson. He died in 1825. Here in the New Burying Ground, in the area reserved for the paupers, lies the Rev. William Steel Dickson, his grave now marked by a stone. He was one of the United Irishmen, was imprisoned for his political activities, and though later released lived in very reduced circumstances until his death in 1824 at the age of eighty.



**Gravestone of the Rev. William Steel Dickson**



**Plan of Belfast Harbour in 1833 showing Ritchie's Dock. The Poor House can be seen at the top left corner**





William Steel Dickson

Alexander Mitchell, the blind engineer is buried here. Born in 1780, he was totally blind by the time he reached manhood, but he lived a long and busy life, dying in 1868. It was his invention of the screw pile, described as a simple means of constructing durable lighthouses in deep water in shifting sands that gained him the Telford Medal, and a place in the history of civil engineering. Where can such a biographical record stop? There are the remains of many thousands of Belfast folk here, together with the strangers that from time to time died far from their native places. At every step, to right and to left, the visitor sees names still familiar in the history and present day life of the town: Mulholland, Ewart, Workman, Ward, Bristow, Dunville, Murray, Dobbin, Suffern, Eakenhead, Batt, Herron, and many more.

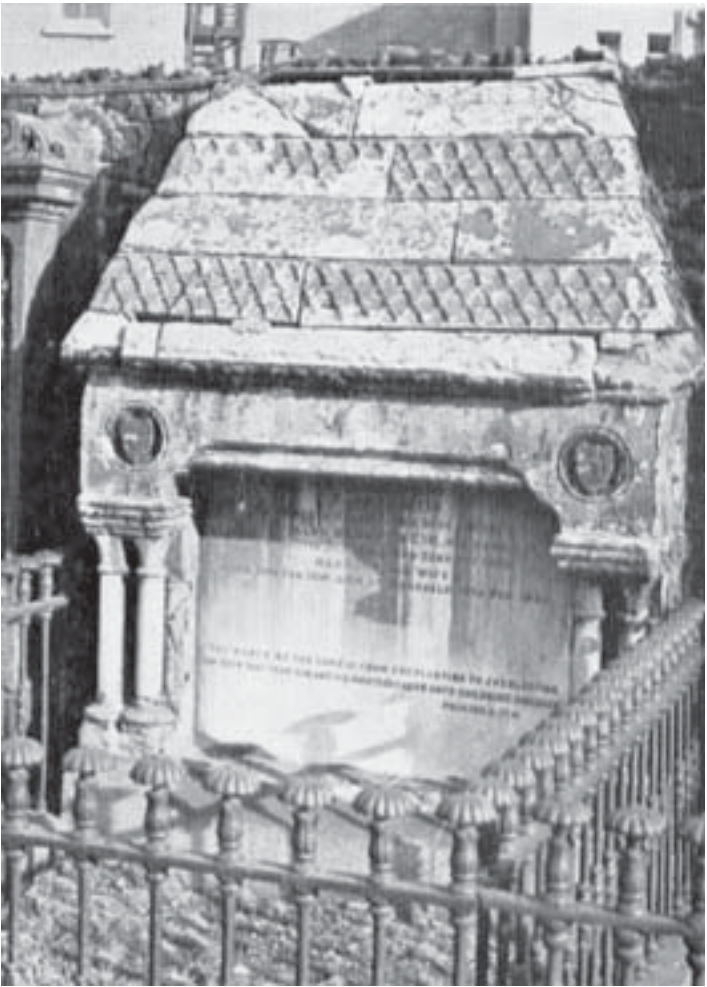


The Hyndman Grave

Like many old graveyards, too, the place has its curiosities. There is the Hyndman memorial with its statue of the faithful dog looking down from the top (now sadly gone). George Crawford Hyndman was a great amateur naturalist, and it is perhaps not so strange after all to see his dog with him still, when it is recalled that he used to keep a crocodile and a chameleon as domestic pets. What could be more striking than the headstone of John Young, M.A., LL.D., Professor of Moral Philosophy in the Academical Institution, for it simply states,



Another strange and very beautiful memorial is that of the Journey-man Coopers with its handsome heraldic carving on one side and on the other the names of those members who are buried there (below). In 1847 Hugh Crawford, an inmate of the House, died at the age of 102, and was interred in this plot, though his name does not appear on the headstone. The final curiosity is close to the entrance gate, a few yards along the Henry Place wall. It is the monument of the Weir family, and is very obviously a stone fireplace from some big old house. Tradition handed down among those who have worked in the graveyard has it that this fireplace came from a house formerly on the site of the Queen's University of Belfast, but no reliable confirmation of this is forthcoming, and as will be seen from the style of the structure itself, the building from which it came was no insignificant one.



The Weir Family Grave



Of all the spots in the New Burying Ground, none has a more poignant history than the almost unbroken stretch of grass at the lower side of the upper plot (below). Surrounded by trees and shrubs, and almost devoid of headstones, it is known to this day as the Cholera Ground, for in it are buried victims of the great epidemic of 1832-33 and it was afterwards used as a burial place for the poor in the crisis that followed the potato famine of 1845-6. *Though seldom a decade of years ever elapsed [wrote Malcolm in 1851] without bringing an epidemic of some description in its train, yet, for nearly two centuries, none had been so appalling in its rapidity or fatality, as to inspire horror or produce despair. The giant pestilences of former days were deemed but the imagery of history, and never again likely to be realised; and a feeling of security - of immunity from the fearful times of the black death and the plague prevailed.* In the autumn of 1830, intelligence reached these shores, that the Asiatic Cholera had crossed the Russian frontier, and was steadily marching in a westward direction. Even then, and when this news was confirmed by sub-sequent accounts of its appearance in Poland, Austria, and Prussia, the public mind in these countries was scarcely roused to any degree of excitement. The death winged enemy came, however, marching on, still west-ward; and in the month of May, 1831, it had reached the cities of Riga and Dantzic, and soon afterwards the chief cities of Europe. As the accounts of its steady advance arrived, day by day, heightened also with reminiscences of its onslaught in India, in 1817, and subsequent years, an anxious concern, at length, began to be felt for the safety of these realms. The general cry was- "It comes!-it comes!" The interest in the Cholera news-columns was now fearfully increased, and when, at length, in the month of October, the enemy suddenly appeared at Sunderland, a sense of impending danger sank into the every heart. In a very few months it spread rapidly over different parts, both north and south, of Great Britain; and on the 29th of February, 1832, the first case in this town appeared. The ordinary machinery for dealing with such outbreaks at that time was the emergency Board of Health appointed ad hoc in any place needing it, and answerable to a Central Board in Dublin. Such a board was set up in Belfast in November 1831 and applied to the Charitable Society, among other public bodies, for support, when it was *Resolved that the Chairman be requested to write a letter to Mr. Trevor stating that this Committee will be at all times ready to co-operate with the Board of Health, as far as lies in their power.*



In Belfast a fund of some £700 was raised. Cholera wards were rapidly built at the back of the Fever Hospital in Frederick Street providing accommodation for fifty patients, a large house in Lancaster Street was rented for isolating suspected cases or contacts, while a programme of street cleansing, and the supervision of the poorer houses was under-taken. Two houses were also rented in different parts of the town to be used as night stations for the provision of medicines, and where palanquins would be available for the transport of patients to hospital. Even before the cholera appeared in the town the Charitable Society decided that at the earliest sign of an outbreak they would shut off the House from the public. The very day the first case was recognised final instructions were given.

*Messrs. Clarke ,Matier, and Suffern are authorised to erect a wooden Gate and barrier within the present Entrance Gate to prevent the inmates having access to it.*

In March the Committee agreed to supply coffins to the Board of Health and to `prepare one of the cradles as a bearer to convey patients'. To raise the resistance of the inmates to infection Dr. Forcade and Dr. McGee advised that they should be given a rich meat broth containing cubed beef, and 224lb of beef were ordered on one day each week for this purpose. By mid-summer the cholera was raging in the town. Children who had absconded from the Poor House were only readmitted after a period in one of the Society's small houses, which had been taken over as an isolation unit. Admission to the House itself depended on further medical opinion. The inmates were virtually prisoners.

*11th August.*

*The Children to have play on Monday, being fair day, And a moderate allowance of Tobacco & Snuff granted to the Inmates, as they are now precluded from going out to procure either.*

*The orderly has been freed from the importunities of the inmates to get out, the House being closed.*

It was the opinion of some that this isolation was as good for their morals as it was for their health.

At the Annual Meeting that autumn, a full report was made on the Society's experiences during the epidemic.

*In the period which has elapsed since the last Annual meeting of the Subscribers to this Institution, a very awful dispensation from the Supreme Disposer of events has taken place; and in the contemplated, and actual arrival of the Epidemic Cholera in Belfast, many precautionary measures were taken generally, and in all public charitable establishments particularly, to avert and arrest, with due submission to the will of God, the progress of the impending evil.*

*The Committee could not overlook this remarkable feature in the occurrences of the past year without doing injustice to the history of the times in which they live - to the active zeal and eminent talents of their own physicians, and to the no less praiseworthy exertions of the valuable and highly distinguished medical practitioners in the town of Belfast.*

*The prevalence of this dreadful calamity became universal in Great Britain and Ireland. It first appeared in Sunderland, in England, on the 26th of October, 1831, and then gradually extended its pestiferous influence over almost the whole surface of the British Isles. Contrary to the usual course of the maladies that have been hitherto known to afflict the human frame and destroy life, it commences with the symptoms of death, apparently at once attacking the citadel of the heart, and often, in a few hours, terminating fatally. It sometimes is contagious, sometimes, after the death of one or more objects of its withering power, it unexpectedly disappears. For the most part the aged, feeble, & intemperate are its victims, but often the strong, the moral, the regular, and the temperate of both sexes sink under its desolating ascendancy.*

*But such has been the success of the universal perseverance and skill of the Physicians of Belfast, aided by the zeal, judgement, & indefatigable exertions of the Board of Health, and by the liberality & co-operation of its patriotic inhabitants, depending always on the Divine blessing, that, in the report of the Board of Health, November 12th., 1832, the number of deaths since the commencement of the disorder in Belfast were only 418, while the recoveries were 2409; total number of cases, 2827.*

*This awful calamity appears now to have ceased, and we trust that it will be a long period before it revisits us.*

*The Committee of the Poor-House, acting on the advice & opinion of their physicians, resolved, that, on the first appearance of Epidemic Cholera in Belfast, the gates of the Institution should be shut, the inmates strictly confined within the enclosed Grounds, and no communication held with the Town, or any person admitted, except the Members of Committee, the Physicians, and persons authorised by them. Accordingly, when the Pestilence, long dreaded, and for some months partially felt, had, early in the month of June, been unequivocally established in Belfast, and that the Board of Health had full and constant employment, the House was closed, and all intercourse forbidden, with the exceptions already mentioned. The good effects of this salutary regulation were proved by the result. For*

*up-wards of three months, when the disorder was at its greatest height in the town, the inhabitants of the Poor House were free from its deadly influence, and even the ordinary mortality of the inmates was less in proportion than had ever been known in the same space of time since the first Establishment of the Poor House.*

*Notwithstanding these precautionary measures, however, an accident at length introduced the Cholera into the House; but, even then, the vigilance of the Physicians, with the blessing of God, soon arrested its progress. Some improvements and alterations having been made in the approach to the Burying Ground, in the month of October, it was found necessary to take down the house of recovery situated there, and to remove the inhabitants into the Poor House. One of the grave-diggers had unfortunately been infected with the Cholera before he came in, and as soon as that melancholy fact was ascertained he was sent to the public Hospital where he died the next day; he communicated the complaint to another; but, altogether, there were only four Victims to the Cholera in the Poor House. Several others who exhibited the premonitory symptoms, recovered by a prompt and judicious application of the usual remedies, and the House is now perfectly free from contagion.*

In spite of the heavy mortality in the town the records of the Society only record the burial of twenty-three victims in the graveyard. The cholera reappeared in 1834, and in August of that year, on medical advice, the Poor House was closed for a fortnight. Fever of various kinds never seems to have been completely absent, and that winter it was agreed to vaccinate each child received into the house irrespective of its medical history, as several children had been admitted while incubating smallpox. The years 1836-7 saw further epidemics of fever. In addition to what were probably typhus and relapsing fever there were influenza and erysipelas, and so great was the demand for beds in the town that additional accommodation was provided by opening the Academical Institution's unused hospital in Barrack Street. These diseases do not seem to have affected the Poor House materially, as they escape all notice in the



**During that dreadful period in Irish history which became known as The Famine the only thing between many families and starvation was institutions such as the Work House and the Poor House**

minutes.

*In 1840 the committee Resolved that as that portion of the Burying Ground of the Belfast Charitable Society which has heretofore been appropriated to the interments of paupers, is now almost filled. The Committee are most reluctantly compelled to come to the determination of confining the interments to those who die in their own Establishment from the 10th April, and that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Committee of the Fever Hospital, to the Magistrates and Church Wardens.*

Though it is not mentioned in this resolution, they had also given permission to the committees of the Lying-In-Hospital and the Belfast District Lunatic Asylum to bury their dead in the New Burying Ground, only that they shall be at the expenses of digging the graves.

But the ground had still another role to play in the medical and social history of Belfast. The poor of Ireland, never a season ahead of hunger, were to suffer such privations and hardship that very many were to die of pure starvation, while others, driven. from home by despair were to roam the country and crowd to the towns for work and food. The first evidence that vagrancy was on the increase in Belfast came In 1840, when the Poor House Committee decided once more to exercise their Statutory powers of arresting persons found begging in the street. At a special meeting of the Society in February it was agreed to prepare the necessary warrant, and appoint a small committee to supervise the constables employed for the purpose.

The year 1845 saw the first appearance of the potato blight which in the following season was to destroy the whole crop. The winter of 1846-7 reduced the rural poor to a severe and often fatal starvation level, and caused the great drift to the centres of population. Hungry, infested with vermin, and huddled together wherever warmth and shelter could be got, many became the victims of the louse borne fevers then endemic in so many centres in Ireland, and such as could travel carried the infestation and infection with them.

That winter smallpox and dysentery were rife among the poor of Belfast, and, according to Malcolm, several hundred cases of these diseases were transferred to the General Hospital from the workhouse. To this picture was now added ‘the fever’, believed by MacArthur to have been a mixture of typhus and relapsing fever.

The onset of the epidemic, viewed from the distance of over a century, would seem to be unquestionably due to the movement into Belfast of the infested and infected victims of the potato famine, but Malcolm, who lived through those days ascribes its introduction to a more dramatic event, the appearance of fever in the hold of an emigrant ship bound for America.

*The Swatara [he said] had sailed from Liverpool, with several hundred passengers, and was many days out on her passage before the disease com-menced to appear. At this very time the winds were so contrary, that the vessel could not make further way, and the captain was obliged to return without delay. He put into this port in a very shattered condition, with several sick, and the passengers generally in a sad plight, in consequence of the scarcity of provisions. The sick passengers were landed, and after having recruited, the captain again put to sea, but had not proceeded far when she was obliged to run into Derry, in consequence this time, however, of the spread of the fever amongst the passengers. After some delay, she was once more under way, but was obliged to retrace her course for the third time. On this occasion she returned to Belfast, with a large proportion of her passengers attacked. They were removed to the General Hospital at once. The fever in the town now began to increase, and in a very short period, the Hospital was so full that the Board of Guardians were urged to give more extended relief. The numbers increased, however, so rapidly that even this could have been of little avail. Much greater accommodation was wanting to contend with an epidemic which was beginning to exhibit unprecedented strength.*

*Accordingly, the inhabitants were called together, on April, 27th, to petition for a Board of Health, which was immediately granted.*

The Union Infirmary was enlarged by ninety beds, a shed was erected in the grounds of the General Hospital, the old cholera buildings were put into use, and the College Hospital in the old Barracks was opened again. Much later, in the summer, tents were put up on the new workhouse grounds to accommodate about 700 convalescent patients.

The Charitable Society, too, prepared its house to meet this event, 24th April.

*In pursuance of the Physician's report it is ordered that none of the Inmates be allowed to leave the House during the prevalence of disease in the Town - the Children to be taken as usual to their place of Worship under proper care. The Committee of Internal Economy to prepare rooms for the reception of infectious diseases, and also be requested to procure a supply of - Medicine - . . . that the Members of the Town Mission be requested to attend here each Sabbath during the present prohibition.*

But the Society had a more positive role to play.

*6th May.*

*Dr. Andrews & Dr. McGee appeared as a deputation from the Board of Health requesting the Committee to make arrangements for receiving Surgical cases and certain classes of accidents from the General Hospital so as to make room for additional Fever Patients. . . . Resolved that this board readily accede to the request and ... That the Medical attendants of this Charity be requested to take charge of any Surgical and Medical patients that may be sent in . . . .*

Two days later:

*A deputation from the General Hospital attended guaranteeing the expense of all patients to be received by the Charity. . . .*

*Resolved by Dr. Purdon & seconded by Rt. Rev. Dr. Denvir That . . . it appearing that the certificates of Students would require to be signed by the Medical Staff of the General Hospital - Resolved under the advice and with the concurrence of Dr. Purdon & Surgeon McCleery - that the Patients to be admitted shall be considered as continuing under the General Hospital and shall for the reasons above stated continue under the care of their Medical Officers.*

The Society asked the nurse in charge of these patients to make out a list of all the things she needed and this, with a request for the necessary bedding, was forwarded to the House Surgeon of the Hospital.

Among the first cases for which admission was requested was one of dysentery, and the Steward on his own initiative refused it. At the next meeting:

*Resolved that the Committee approved of the Steward's conduct in not admitting the case reported to him as dysentery. Resolved that on account of the very limited accommodation that this House can afford the Committee are reluctantly obliged to act upon their original resolution to provide room only for casualty cases in addition to those which had been under the charge of the General Hospital - But that if any room still [remains] that the Steward be empowered to receive any case certified as not infectious by the Surgeon of the General Hospital for a night until accommodation can be provided elsewhere, when danger of life may seem*



*involved from non admission. This Committee further direct that their Steward shall admit no case of any kind without a certificate from the Surgeons of the General Hospital that it is not infectious.*

It was about this time that the Society agreed to postpone the closing of the Burying Ground to the poor.

The wording of the resolution suggests that they arrived at this decision at the request of the Board of Health.

22nd May, 1847.

*Resolved that this Committee agree to Extend the time for allowing paupers to be buried in their Ground to the 1st of July provided there be room in the part allotted to that purpose & that the Steward send a copy- of this resolution to the Secretary of the Board of Health.*

*A special meeting was summoned in this connexion on 9th July,*

*... in consequence of the very great difficulty in finding Burial Ground for the Poor in the present crisis at the suggestion of the Board of Health. - A Certificate as to the safety from infection in opening the Graves of bodies buried in the time of Cholera 1832, & 1833, signed by many of the most respectable Medical Practitioners is inserted in their Minutes - Resolved that ten lots ... be allowed to be used for the Burial of the poor in order to give time for more extensive measures being adopted for providing a public cemetery.*

That very day the **News-Letter** described the scene at the Society's grave-yard.

*In the course of the present week, we saw no fewer than twenty coffins, containing the corpses of persons who had died of fever in the various hospitals in town during the proceeding twenty-four hours lying for interment in that portion of the New Burying-Ground appropriated for that purpose; while we were informed that two additional cart-loads would arrive before the common grave was ready for their reception! A sight so melancholy was never before witnessed in Belfast.*

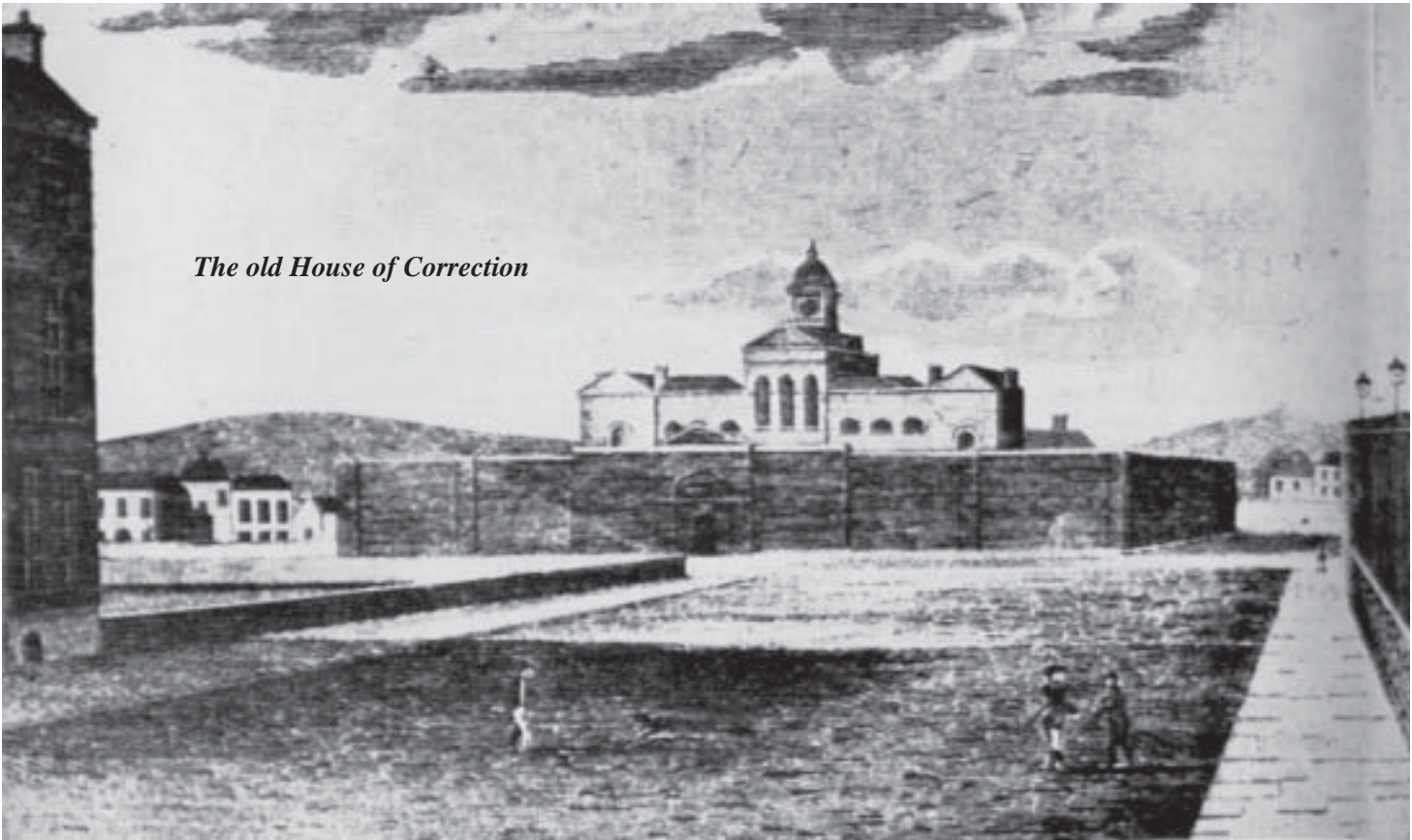
A public meeting was held to consider how best to meet the shortage of ground for burials and in the **News-Letter** of the 16th it is recorded that the parish ground at Shankill was already full, and that the congestion at Friar's Bush was quite as serious as at the Charitable Society's ground. The Rev. Richard Oulton described how he was harrowed by the sights to be seen in all graveyards, where coffin was heaped upon coffin until the last was not more than two inches below the ground.

Though the factors concerned in the propagation of typhus and re-lapsing fever were not understood at the time, it was quite fully realised that to control the epidemic it was first necessary to control vagrancy. One of the actions taken by the central Board in Dublin had been to post pickets in the country to prevent mass movements of the starving poor. The task in Belfast was to clear the town of the invading hordes or at any rate to isolate them. Another special meeting of the Society was held in the Poor House on 20th July.

*This Meeting was summoned at the request of the Board of Health to ask for the co-operation of the Charitable Society in clearing the Town of the vagrants that are now so troublesome and so dangerous to the publick health - and to request that they would put in force the powers vested in them by 11 & 12 George III Chap. 30 Sect. 8 and 13 R 14 Geo. III Chap 46, for this purpose. Resolved that . . . be appointed with their assistants to carry into execution the powers of the said Acts as far as authorised by the same - and that the Chairman (Rev. William Bruce) - Dr. Denvir & Mr. Oulton be requested to apply to the Committee for Police affairs for the use of a portion of the Old House of Correction for this purpose - and to request the Committee of the Soup Kitchen to provide for the maintenance of the Vagrants so taken up - also that the Seal of the Corporation be affixed to the warrant - Resolved that the Constables acting under this warrant shall report every evening to the Steward the persons so taken up and confined.*

The House of Correction was situated on the south side of Howard Street opposite the site occupied today by Church House. The inscription over the front door, ‘Within amend, without beware’, had been a warning to generations of delinquents, but in 1847 it was empty, or at any rate not fully used. Here on the 31st of July and 2nd August committees of the Charitable Society met and received a report from some of their members on a plan for dealing with the suppression of mendicity.

*The Deputation appointed to carry into effect the resolution as to the suppression of Street Begging have to report to this Committee that they waited on the Board of Health to explain to them as to the arrangements made by this Committee to act on their request, who expressed their entire approval thereof and that they would as far as they could co-operate with this Society - They afterwards waited on the relief Committee to ascertain as to the payment of the expenses to which this Charity will be subject in carrying into effect the resolution as to Street Begging, and ascertaining that the General Relief Committee had placed funds in their hands out of which they would defray the expenses to be incurred and entered into a resolution to that effect - That upon obtaining this important pledge they waited on Sergeant Lindsay of the Police who selected four steady &*



*The old House of Correction*

*active men to act as Constables for whom they procured suitable distinctive clothing, and also procured the services of Mr. Hunter to act as overseer of the Workhouse, a person who had been highly recommended and heretofore acted in that capacity. That in order to give due publicity and warning to all parties, they issued placards and had them extensively posted and circulated warning all vagrants of the intention to put the act in force on and after the 30th Inst. They further arranged to have for the present 6 male and 6 Female wards fitted up with bed and bedding in one of the wings of the Old House of Correction allotted for that purpose as a House of Industry, and that a supply of rations was to be furnished by the relief Committee and such materials would be provided for the work Department as might be required so as to have the Industrial part of the arrangement carried into effective operation. - They have further to report they waited on Mr. Maloney the Stipendiary Magistrate to ascertain as to the Committal of such vagrants as may be taken up, and after entering into full explanation of the details, and viewing as the Committee do that the effectively carrying the act into operation is of the utmost importance, this Committee are of opinion that it is indispensably necessary that a Quorum of the Committee should meet each day or three days in each week to investigate into the cases taken up, and commit them to the House of Industry as it appears they are by their Act warranted to do. They have ordered the Constables whom they selected within their clothing & the Superintendent to appear before the Committee, and wish the Committee to make such arrangements as will carry the intentions of the Committee on the recommendation of the Board of Health into operation.*

The next day saw the beginning of this enormous task.

*August 3rd. House of Correction*

*Present Dr. Denvir, J. Getty, Dr. C. Purdon. A. J. Macrory, J. Knox, Revd. R. Oulton. Revd. W. Bruce in the Chair.*

*Samuel Burns aged 16 from parish of Kilmore near Crossgar convicted of begging on Carrickhill to be confined one fortnight from yesterday - Constable Richey. James McDonnell aged 25 from Drumane Tullamote West latterly from Glasgow sent by the Town found begging in Hercules Place to be confined for one fortnight from yesterday - Constable Richey. Biddy Flinn who had with her a son 10 years old and a child about 2 years old living in Queery's Entry North Street was found begging in College Square North, to be confined for one fortnight from yesterday with liberty to have her children with her - Constable Richey. Mr. Knox is requested to have the Shower bath repaired & to direct Mr. Hunter to have these vagrants washed and cleaned - & to procure prison dresses in sufficient number to allow their clothes to be washed - with brand for marking the same.*

From then onwards beggars were arrested in great numbers in the streets

and it became necessary for two members to sit each day to consider their cases. It was

*Resolved that the livery worn by the Constables being such as to render them too conspicuous to vagrants who run off on seeing them, it is expedient to permit the use of other clothes for the present.*

*August 6th*

*One vagrant Esther Donnelly was brought forward charged by James Ritchie with begging in College Street, on examination she stated that she came from Dungannon eight years ago with her husband Peter Donnelly a quay porter who is a drunkard living in 24 Weigh house Lane. It is recommended that she be detained here for a fortnight, she being permitted to keep with her an infant child and a boy about Six years old. She is apparently in great distress and it is judged advisable that she be kindly treated as well on account of her extreme destitution owing to her husband's misconduct, as on account of her acute feeling of her situation - we recommend that the Poor Law Guardians be requested to compel her husband to support herself and children.*

Gradually the lists became longer at each session, and for many days was reduced to a simple nominal roll. By the autumn the Society had got into financial difficulties over the whole business.

*Poor House 23rd October*

*Moved that this Charitable Society laving already expended a considerable sum in the suppression of Mendicancy, & finding that they can obtain no further aid from the Soup Kitchen or Relief Committees notice be given to the Constables & other Officers engaged by this Committee that they will be discharged on Saturday the 30th & that the Chairman & Mr Owen be appointed to wait on the Police Committee of the Town Council to communicate the foregoing resolution & to urge on them the public importance of their undertaking the duty which this Committee are thus compelled to relinquish.*

The Society's minutes for the work done at the old House of Correction continue until 5 February when the last of the vagrants were disposed of by dismissal or transfer to the Police Office While the Charitable Society was contributing its share to the measures taken to combat the fever, the epidemic swept the town. By July 1817 the weekly admissions to hospital reached 600, and the number of cases in hospital was at one time over 2,000. From then on-ward there was a gradual decline. By the middle of November the General Hospital ceased to admit fever cases, and the barrack Hospital was closed the following month. The new Workhouse Hospital provided sufficient beds for the remaining cases.

*Taking the aggregate of the three hospitals [says Malcolm] the total number of admissions from the beginning of the epidemic till the end of December, 1847, was 13,676! to which, if we add a fair proportion for private cases, we shall have some idea of the enormous extent of this memorable pestilence. It may be safely affirmed, that one out of every five persons in Belfast was attacked during this year.*

As that tragic episode was drawing to a close the Charitable Society received the annual report of its committee.

*When resigning into the hands of the General Board the charge entrusted to them. for the past year, your Committee would, in the first place, desire to return their humble thanks to the Giver of every good, for the Mercy shown to the inmates of this Charity during the year that is past, while the Scourges of pestilence and famine were desolating the land. It is with sincere and humble gratitude we record the fact that but two of the inmates of this house were attacked with fever, and neither died of it; and although the apparently large number of twenty six died during the year, yet all these with the exception of four, had reached a good old age; most of them were beyond the term usually allotted to man; one had attained the advanced age of one hundred and two; while the average age of the twenty six was sixty eight seven tenths and the united years of all together extended to seventeen hundred and eighty six. It is also with thankfulness your Committee would state that although their predecessors in office had apprised your Board last year, that an increase of your debt was to be expected during the then coming year of Scarcity - a warning too fully borne out in the result, the necessities of life having at one period risen to about double the ordinary prices - and although they with. your Sanction had opened the house for the reception of ten inmates beyond these which it has been determined for the present should be considered its full complement; yet the debt to your Treasurer has been barely increased by one hundred pounds; and although this debt, the accumulation of four years of extraordinary exertion, is undoubtedly large, having been incurred for those important and necessary improvements in the house which have proved so beneficial, your Committee see no cause to regret its amount....*

The Society also recorded the death of Surgeon James McCleery

*. . . who for a period of twelve years had zealously and benevolently fulfilled the laborious duties of Surgeon to the male side of this Charity. He had died of fever on 10 July, at the age of fifty-three, and had been buried in the Society's ground. He was a native of Portaferry, and practised in North Street. His son was appointed to succeed him. The annual report of the following year continues the story.*

*At the close of last year £110 were due to this Charity by the Committee of the General Hospital, which have since been paid. This . . . debt was incurred by the expense attendant on the treatment of their patients in your hospital during the late alarming epidemics with which we were visited. Your Committee believe that the public generally owe much to the Managers of this Charity for the course they adopted on that occasion. At a great addition of trouble to themselves and your officers, they extended the benefits of this Charity to many Surgical cases and non-infectious diseases which would otherwise during the prevalence of Fever, Dysentery and Small-pox, not have had Hospital accommodation. Another claim upon the gratitude of the public was alluded to in last report - namely the exercise of the power in your Committee by Act of Parliament for the suppression of vagrancy. Your Committee in coming into office pursued the course adopted by their predecessors until the matter was taken up by the Officers of Health appointed by the parish. The extent of their claim will best appear from the fact that 1530 strolling vagrants were apprehended and brought before them, some of the Committee attending each day for the purpose at the old House of Correction. It is only right however that the members of this Corporation and other subscribers should be informed that the funds of this Charity were drawn upon to a very limited extent for this purpose. It may be interesting to add, that the result of this step and of other steps subsequently taken, has been that not less than 14,000 poor have been forwarded on their way home by the proper authorities, beyond the boundaries of the parish - that probably not one per cent of this number has returned - and that if the steps taken by your Committee had not been followed up (after making every allowance for those who might have procured employment or voluntarily left town) at the most moderate calculation, 5,000 paupers would have settled. themselves with their attendant evils upon your town at an expense to this Union of at least £20,000 per annum.*

The New Burying Ground is indeed a visible memorial of that terrible disaster, for in it rest the bodies of over one thousand of its victims. Some idea of the prevalence of the various types of illness then infecting the community can be gauged from the following table prepared from the reg-



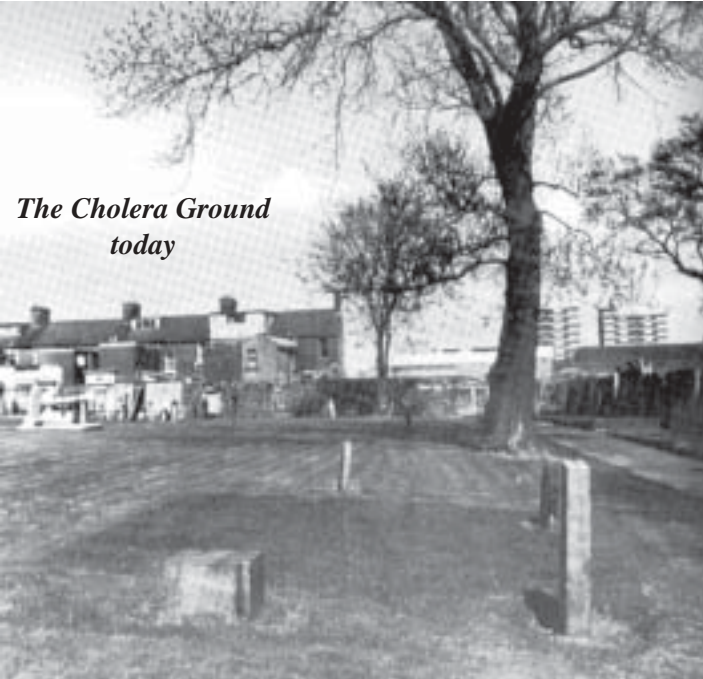
istry of the Clifton Street cemetery alone, though no attempt was made to distinguish between typhus and relapsing fever.

BURIALS OF INFECTIOUS CASES IN THE NEW BURYING GROUND DURING 1847	
"Fever"	812
Dysentery	131
Small-pox	42
Sent from various hospitals without any diagnosis	64
TOTAL	1,049

Belfast was still not at the end of its serious epidemics. In December 1848 cholera made its appearance again, and the Society started planning once more.

*Resolved that during the prevalence of Cholera the House be shut during week days so as that no inmate be allowed to leave the House or any visitor to be admitted to see any inmate. - and that the following arrangement be made with respect to the attendance of the inmates at their respective places of public worship - viz - that three persons be engaged to take the inmates to three places of worship viz Church of England - Roman Catholic Chapel & one Presbyterian Church for one sermon viz the morning service on each Sunday - and that Trinity Church the Chapel in Donegall Street & the Presbyterian Church in Rosemary Street be for the present the houses to be attended. That it be requested that a place in each of these Churches be set apart for the inmates and that the respective Sextons be requested to inspect the roll of those that attend on the arrival of the inmates - to take care that none leave the Church during the hours of worship and that they return the roll to the men in charge upon their leaving Church.*

As on a previous occasion those who had been on leave from the House were isolated on their return, and only readmitted to the main building on medical approval. All the restrictions were removed in January 1850. During the epidemic of 1849 the House escaped infection entirely, though in Belfast there were over 2,000 cases with a mortality of 33 per cent. Once more the old Cholera Ground claimed its quota, and thirty-five victims were added to the tragic total. Today, when little disturbs the peace of this old graveyard, it is difficult to credit the amount of Belfast history that can be written round the plots, marked and unmarked, of what was once indeed the New Burying Ground.



*The Cholera Ground today*





# THE OLD GATE HOUSE

Most graveyards have gate lodges and after the enlargement of the burying ground in the late 1820's, a new gate was erected on what was known as Hill Hamilton's Avenue (now Henry Place). With this new gate there was also built the burying ground's first gate lodge.

Not much is known about the first gate lodge other than the fact that it was used by the guards who were hired to prevent the 'body snatchers' up until the early 1830s. This lodge was demolished in the 1840s to clear the way for a new gate lodge, and like the former, not much is known about it other than the fact that the burying ground caretaker, a man named John Nelson, lived in it. A third gate lodge was built during the 1870s and this house had all the requirements of a modern house of the time:- Two bedrooms, inside bathroom, living room, kitchen and a parlour. It also had a large rear yard with a gateway leading into the burying ground which was used to store the various tools used for the upkeep of the ground. The following is a list of those who lived in this house:



Belfast Street Directory 1949

- Alexander Johnston 1871-1894
- William Brown 1895-1902
- James Martin 1902-1939
- David Megrath 1940-1967

From 1967 onwards, the lodge was occupied by Ms Margaret Growney, who was one of the catering staff in Clifton House. She stayed here until 1978 when she moved into Clifton House itself. After Mrs Growney left the house was blocked up and soon after it was vandalised. It lay in a state of disrepair for a number of years until it was demolished in February 1991 to clear way for a new building in the grounds of St Enoch's Church.



CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1901.

FORM A.

RETURN of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY and their VISITORS, BOARDERS, SERVANTS, &c., who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the 31st of MARCH, 1901.

NAME AND SEX	RELATION to Head of Family	RELIGIOUS PROFESSION	EDUCATION	AGE	SEX	RACE, PROFESSION, OR OCCUPATION	MARRIAGE	WHERE BORN	DATE LAST VISITED	IF DEAD and Death Date
Henry Johnston	Head of Family	Anglican	Read and Write	66	M	Retired	Married	Ireland		
Mrs. Johnston	Wife	Anglican	Read and Write	65	F	Housewife	Married	Ireland		

I hereby certify, as required by the Act 62 Vic., cap. 6, & 4 (1), that the Return is correct, according to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I believe the foregoing to be a true Return.

CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1911.

FORM A.

RETURN of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY and their VISITORS, BOARDERS, SERVANTS, &c., who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the 2nd of APRIL, 1911.

NAME AND SEX	RELATION to Head of Family	RELIGIOUS PROFESSION	EDUCATION	AGE	SEX	RACE, PROFESSION, OR OCCUPATION	MARRIAGE	WHERE BORN
James Martin	Head of Family	Anglican	Read and Write	25	M	Brassfinisher	Married	Ireland
Agnes Martin	Wife	Anglican	Read and Write	33	F	Scholar	Married	Ireland
James Martin	Son	Anglican	Read and Write	11	M	Scholar		Ireland
John Martin	Son	Anglican	Read and Write	9	M	Scholar		Ireland
Mary Martin	Daughter	Anglican	Read and Write	1	F	Weaver	Single	Ireland

I hereby certify, as required by the Act 62 Vic., cap. 6, & 4 (1), that the Return is correct, according to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I believe the foregoing to be a true Return.



# THE GROUND TODAY

At the beginning of the last century the number of burials taking place at the burying ground were falling dramatically. Because of this the Belfast Charitable Society was no longer making enough profit to uphold its duties within the graveyard. The family plots (which belonged to the families and not the Society) were no longer being maintained by relatives and began to fall into a state of decline despite numerous appeals made by the Charitable Society for assistance in various refurbishment projects.

In 1907 a 'tidy up' scheme began on the burying ground and much of the overgrowth was cut back. At the same time a full record of the tombstone inscriptions was taken. But once all the work was completed maintenance was impossible for the one caretaker. Within a few years the ground was completely overgrown again and this growth was to continue for the next

sixty years despite numerous attempts to prevent it.

In 1969, with the outbreak of what became known as the 'Troubles' the British Army moved into the nearby Glenravel Street Barracks and secured the area around it. This included the Burying Ground, and here they took over the holding of the keys and placed within the ground hundreds of meters of barbed wire and built a number of observation posts to prevent any IRA attack.

In the early part of the 1970s the Glenravel Street Barracks moved to a new site on North Queen Street and soon after the keys were handed back to the Charitable Society. From this point onwards maintenance of the burying ground was a bigger problem that it was at any other time in the graveyard's history.



*ABOVE - The lower ground around the mid 1970's showing the state of disrepair the cemetery fell into.*

*LEFT - Aerial photograph showing the cemetery and the old Poor House in 1965.*

Apart from the ivy, weeds and bramble all being overgrown, the amount of barbed wire made the use of machinery impossible, so any work being done had to be carried out entirely with the use of hand tools; and there was also the added problem of vandalism occurring mainly throughout the 1970's.

In 1975 the Charitable Society employed Messrs Duff Ltd, to clear the ground at a cost of £1,750. This was followed by help from Enterprise Ulster. Unfortunately, the overgrowth was coming back almost as soon as it was being cut. Preservation was going to be a major undertaking, one for which the Charitable Society funds were not available.

On the 21st of July, 1978, the Society wrote a letter to the Belfast City Council asking them to consider taking over the burying ground. The letter was passed to the Parks Department and they agreed. In 1979 a full-time caretaker was placed at the cemetery to try and keep the ground in order.

In 1985 the Parks Department, with the aid of a Government grant began a major scheme to restore the burying ground. This scheme was simple, though expensive. The idea was to clear out the whole ground, except the tombstones, and to landscape it. At the same time all the tombstones were cleaned and the surrounding walls restored. All was completed by 1990.

The cemetery was not free from its problems just yet. At the time of compiling this book the cemetery remains locked to the public even though the City Council promote the site as one for tourism. Some years ago Glenravel Project began to conduct tours of the graveyard and each year interest in these intensifies. In 2002 the Project submitted a proposal to take over the management (but not ownership) of the cemetery, place a full time caretaker and guide and to open the cemetery seven days a week with tours conducted every Saturday. Unbelievably the Council said no even though it would have opened the graveyard to the public and saved the ratepayers thousands.

It's a sad thought that the citizens of this city and those from further afield can not come into the graveyard and enjoy a few moments of peace and quite in one of the most historic parts of Belfast and learn about its past citizens at the same time.



