

## THE HISTORY OF HANNAHSTOWN

Hannahstown, which lies at the foot of the Black Hill, has a long history of steadfastness to all things Irish and Gaelic. To the outsider there is not much which would attract attention to this place. Yet in 1798 the area was under attack from a group of Orangemen who went under the title 'The Wreckers'. There are a few theories as to how the area came to be known as Hannahstown. Mr. Casey, who was once head teacher of St. Theresa's Primary School, said that there were seven families whose surname was Hannah, and it derived its name from that. What is known was that it was known as Baile an Draighin - the town of the blackthorn.

Most of the history of the area has been recorded by clergy and, as a result, may seem to be one-sided. We know for certain that the area remained strongly Catholic in spite of the Penal Laws and attacks real and threatened from Orange bigots. There are at least four mass rocks in the area. There is one in the Colin Glen, one on the slopes of the Colin Mountain, one on the site of the Rock chapel (from whence it got its name), and one on Bohill Mountain. These mass rocks were used by the locals of Hannahstown during Penal times when they were banned from hearing Mass in public. The priests were not allowed in the country at all. The Irish language was also attacked yet remained strong in the area when it died out in other places.

The first real thing we know for sure of the Penal times is that the then parish priest of Belfast, Feidhlimidh o hAdhmaill, came down from Hannahstown and gave himself up to the British in Belfast in 1707. He was thrown into Belfast gaol and remained there until his death. Belfast gaol was in Castle Street in those days. In 1744 the church at Derriaghy was burnt to the ground by the Wreckers. This was an organised gang of Planters who attacked all things Irish at the least excuse.

During the Penal times not all Planters attacked the native Irish. Cathal O'Byrne in his excellent book 'As I Roved Out' recalls the story of Belle Steele. She was a woman of seventy-five years when she died. She lived in a place called Friars Row which was only demolished when work was started on the building of Poleglass several years ago. It stood on the main road to Twinbrook about halfway between the roundabout and the entrance to the estate. Belle Steele kept the mass vessels and the priest's vestments in a wooden box by her fireside. We do not know why she acted so, but this brave lady is remembered with a road named in her honour in Poleglass.

Again in 1798, the Wreckers appeared to burn down the chapel at Derriaghy and the Rock chapel. They made an effort to attack the school house in Hannahstown but were beaten off by the locals. Also in 1798 one member of the McCance family fought with the United men at the Battle of Ballynahinch. The McCance family came to this part of Ireland at the time of the Elizabethan Plantation and built two large houses in this area of Hannahstown. They were Glenville House which stood in the Carrigart area of Lenadoon and Suffolk House which stood opposite Glengoland. Glenville House was a particularly magnificent building with splendid

gardens and took in a large area of the Lower Glen which they stocked with deer and hunted them. This house was mentioned in tourist information pamphlets of the time.

The chapel and priest's house are not actually in Hannahstown. They are in fact in Englishtown. It is believed that the place name 'Englishtown' is a corruption of the Irish 'Baile na hEaglaise' - Churchtown. While Hannahstown was always peopled by the native Irish, a lot of planters and redcoats lived in Englishtown.

Mr. Casey in his history of the area noted that Hannahstown was more populated in the eighteenth century than it is today. The reason for this is that there was a rapid growth of the linen industry then and people settled in Hannahstown and on the slopes of the Black Mountain. They lived in small cottages which dotted the area, grew their own food and made their own amusement. At this time there was a British army camp on the top of the Black Mountain and a family called Dean supplied this camp with eggs, milk, vegetables and other food stuff. This family lived near the Windy Gap at the top of the mountain. The Gully is also known as Doon's Ravine. Could this be the same family? It would appear so.

The chapel in Hannahstown was built in 1826 and at last the catholic population had a permanent place of worship. Prior to this, mass was heard in the school house which was built in 1792 by Fr. O'Donnell who also built St. Mary's in Chapel Lane - the first chapel in Belfast. The remains of one wall of this school house is still standing in the old part of the graveyard in Hannahstown.

The Colin Glen, which lies below Hannahstown, has an interesting history as well. It is said that pikes used in the Battle of Antrim in 1798 were forged in a cottage near the glen and that the Unitedmen had meetings in the glen itself. History also records that Brian Boirmhire (Brian Boru) also came to the area as close as Cnoc na Craoibhe (Crewe Hill) to subdue the Northern chieftains. So, if not actually in the glen, he had been close to it. Throughout the Plantations the English had been active in the area. Robin Norton built Castle Robin close to the glen to keep an occupation force ready to put down any Irish uprising at this time. The castle is mentioned by Cathal O'Byrne in his book. Nothing of note seems to have happened in the area of Hannahstown until 1907 when a priest by the name of Fr. O'Boyle arrived in the area. He was an old-fashioned sort of man and a great character altogether. One surprising fact about this man was that in the year he arrived in Hannahstown he was out visiting parishioners in the Andersonstown area when he was jeered and attacked by a group of Andersonstown orangemen. He had a great love of horses and went everywhere on horseback. He was also friendly with Mr. Coates who lived in a big house which is now Andersonstown Fold beside the White Fort Inn. Mr. George Coates was an ex-B. Special! Both of the men loved horses and were often seen riding the roads of the area.

There were two main families in the Hannahstown area in the nineteenth century - the Hamills of Trench House and the McCance family of Glenville and Suffolk. The McCances made their fortune through the linen industry and had bleach greens at the above-mentioned houses. The Hamill family had a butcher's business in Hercules Street, later known as Royal Avenue. Trench House was rebuilt in 1880

on its original site. Over the years they had bought a lot of land in Malone, Upper Falls, Finaghy and the general Andersonstown area. By 1903 only six sisters remained and four of these died in a cholera epidemic between 1905-1906. Two sisters lived until 1918. They were Hannah and Theresa and they gave money to build a hall in Hannahstown. This hall was burnt to the ground by the Black and Tans in 1921 - not a lot had changed since the Wreckers had tried to do the same in 1798. Several years ago Fred Heatley wrote an interesting article in the Andersonstown News in which he surveyed the marriage and birth records of Hannahstown parish. The most common surnames were:

Magee	Hamill	Burns
Close	McQuillan	Finnegan
Gribbin	McGerrity	Neeson
	Jordan	

These names are still common in the area and in fact I must thank my friend, Mr. Andy Finnegan from Hannahstown for helping me with this article.