

Gordonville: A Short History of Dundrum and Gordonville

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Introduction

My wife grew up in a beautiful old house in Dundrum called Gordonville, at Sydenham Villas. It is still in the hands of her family. I wanted to know a bit more about the house and I discovered it was a symbol of a very important period in the development of Dundrum. This is its story.

Note: in the article, it will also be referred to as '1 Sydenham Terrace', as this was its original designation.

Dundrum in the early days

The name Dundrum goes back to the time of the Anglo-Norman conquest. Originally it was part of a larger estate, but one of its many owners gave part of it to the Priory of the Holy Trinity. This is now Taney. The remainder became Dundrum. An interesting footnote in history is that a later owner exchanged his Dundrum lands for land in Limerick!

Dundrum was often raided by native Irish people, who would come down from Wicklow. This was something that was happening all over the southern edge of the Pale. To improve the situation, land was often given to families, who in exchange would build and maintain fortifications. Thus, the Fitzwilliam family appears in Dundrum, who erected Dundrum Castle. Ruins of this castle can still be seen today.

In 1816 the vast Fitzwilliam Estate was inherited by the 11th Earl of Pembroke. The estate - although reduced in size - still exists. One of its many possessions was land on which Gordonville would later be built, as we will see below.

Dundrum in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century

In 1766, there were only sixty-six dwellings in the parish of Taney, to which Dundrum belonged. 'Dundrum was then a small village chiefly remarkable for being on the high road to Powerscourt. It had a reputation, though not in an equal degree with Carrickmines, as a health resort. A few houses near the old churchyard formed a separate village known as Churchtown, and the only other neighbouring village of any importance was Windy Arbour, on the road to Dublin, where there was a lodging house'.

In the nineteenth century, the first industrial activity came to the area. Water mills had been in existence for some time, as part of the manorial economy, for grinding corn. Improvements in water mills meant that they were now increasingly used as sawmills, paper mills, cloth and laundry mills. These were mostly beside fast flowing waters, such as at Rockbrook (Owendoher river), Kilternan (Loughlinstown river) and Dundrum (Slang river). In Dundrum from about 1800 we find a paper mill and an iron works on the lands of Dundrum Castle. (This would become the Manor Mill Laundry in 1864).

Dundrum was clearly growing. There was a police station and a post office. A small chapel was built in 1813 on the location of the current Holy Cross church. It was enlarged after the emancipation in 1829 and dedicated in 1837. What this also shows however is that the village was still small, not yet big enough for a church of its own. There was no Airfield (Trevor Overend, the

solicitor who built it, only came to Dundrum in 1894) and more importantly, there was no railway. It was still mostly a rural village.

The Railway

Ireland's first railway was the Dublin and Kingstown Railway (D&KR) between Westland Row in Dublin and Kingstown (Dún Laoghaire), over a distance of 10km and opened in 1834. As it was a success, a second railway from Bray to Harcourt Street was built. This line crossed through Dundrum where a station house was built and opened on 10 July 1854.

The combination of Dundrum's reputation as a healthy place to live and the opening of the new mode of transport soon attracted developers. Dundrum's days as a small rural village would soon be over.

The developers of Sydenham Road and Villas

William W. Bentley and his son John (house and land agents, auctioneers and valuers) decided to get into development and obtained a lease for a period of 99 years from the Earl of Pembroke on 25 March 1857 as well as a lease dated 27 September 1858 from Bartholomew Clifford Lloyd. The two OSI maps (6-inch map from around 1840 overlaid with modern map) below identify which fields were leased. The fields appear to have been chosen because they offer excellent views over Dundrum.

The field boundaries are from the old map, roads and housing from the current. Fields leased are encircled in red:

There must have been a lot of 'wheeling and dealing' going on, as it appears that B.C. Lloyd only obtained the lands of Anna Field in 1857 from the railway company (who must have purchased it for the construction of the line, and then sold the lands that it did not need). The Bentleys themselves did not hold on to all their land for long, selling most of the land on Sydenham Villas to John Doake and Bartholomew Delaney in 1859. They kept land and developed some housing themselves on Sydenham Road, as they appear as owners of houses on Sydenham Road, numbers 3, 4, 7 and 8.

It is mentioned in some sources that they overreached when they developed Foxrock, in partnership with Edward and Anthony Fox. In 1859 they leased the lands of the Foxrock estate from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and Richard Whately, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, with the aim of creating an affluent garden suburb. Due to a slower than expected initial take-up of lots, the founder/developers of Foxrock were said to be bankrupted and did not live to see its successful development into a wealthy suburb. However, this might not be correct, as John Bentley at his death still seems to have been the owner of the properties mentioned above.

John Doake, builder of Gordonville

In 1859, John Doake bought land from the Bentleys on Sydenham Villas. He erected four houses, then known as numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 Sydenham Terrace. The street name was changed to Sydenham Villas between 1891 and 1901. And to add to the confusion, in the planning stages the name Sydenham Avenue was used! It was number 1 that would later become known as Gordonville. The houses all seem to be of the same size and design, as per a map that appears to be from 1871. Nowadays Gordonville is clearly bigger with bay windows and a garage/coach house. The latter can already be seen on OSI maps from the late 19th/early 20th Century.

As can be seen from advertisements developers would often build a house, rent it out and then sell it as an investment property. This appears to have been the intention with the four houses on Sydenham Terrace. After building and renting them out John Doake tried to sell them several times. This advertisement appears to record the first auction of the newly built houses:

Another attempt was made on 29 April 1861 (*Freeman's Journal*). However, John Doake - who must have been a professional developer - owned many properties at the time of his death, including the properties on Sydenham Terrace, which he obviously had been unable to sell.

As we can see from the *Evening Freeman* in 1866, after the death of John Doake the houses went on the market again, as part of his estate, without much success. Perhaps because - according to the Landed Estate records - none of the houses at this stage were rented out. The houses ended up being purchased by Weldon S. Molony, in June 1867, the solicitor who was dealing with the sale, mentioned in the article above. One might assume that being close to the action he saw the possibility of a good deal.

1 Sydenham Terrace

In 1868, Weldon S. Molony was registered as resident of 1 Sydenham Terrace (as well as a property in Dalkey), so it appears that still no tenant was found. In 1870, he sold the properties to Frederick Kennedy, another solicitor, with an office at Lower Ormond Quay who appears to have been more successful in finding tenants. Perhaps Doake and Molony had just been in the marketplace too early. For example, it was only in 1866 that plans were made to replace the catholic chapel in Dundrum with a new church. The building of Holy Cross church started in 1877 and it was completed in 1879.

On 7 December 1875, George Abraham Grierson - who must have been a tenant - died at 1 Sydenham Terrace. He was 82 years old and is buried in Mount Jerome Cemetery. He had married Isabella Ruxton on 15 December 1846 and had been a barrister with offices at Middle Abbey Street up to 1870. There is no mention of him as a barrister after that year, so perhaps he had decided to retire to Dundrum. He was already 77! His unmarried daughter Constantia also lived at 1 Sydenham Terrace in 1875. Isabella died in 1907.

Mark Anthony Toomey had a business at 6 Harcourt Street, but resided at 1 Sydenham Terrace in 1880. Mrs Mark Anthony Toomey gave birth to a son - Richard Fenton - at 1 Sydenham Terrace in April of that year (christened on 9 April). Possibly they had been there already for a few years, as another child was born on 19 January 1878 in Durdunn, which is likely a misspelling of Dundrum. These were her last two children; all four others had been born in Rathmines. Mark Anthony Toomey was born in Dublin in 1844 to Mark Toomey and Jane Kelly. He married Julia Adelaide Bourne in 1868 at St Peter's church in Dublin. She was from a respected legal family. In 1875 he was a wine merchant. Mark Anthony was very active in Freemasonry and was initiated in Commercial Lodge 245 in 1871 in Dublin. In 1878, he was installed as Worshipful Master of this Lodge. He was also a life governor of both the male and female Masonic Orphan Schools in Ireland. There were six children in the family: Mark born 1869 and died in 1871, Louisa Alice born 1871, Mark born 1873, Jane born 1875, Walter or Catherine¹ born 1878 and Richard Fenton born 1880. Mark Anthony Toomey got into financial trouble over a debt he had guaranteed and could not pay. This was a prisonable offence and two of his Bourne brothers-in-law suggested he go to Australia. According to family lore he left for Sydney in 1883 but it may have been closer to

¹ Sandison Roscoefamily tree (<http://www.gritquoy.com/genealogy/getperson.php?personID=I19524&tree=001Master>) and Ancestry records disagree here, although something is amiss with the ancestry record as Catherin is a male!

1880. The family did not re-unite in Australia until 1890, although the couple later split up and Julia went back to Ireland. Mark Anthony died on 29 March 1916 in Sydney.

A new owner took over 1 Sydenham Terrace in 1881. Perhaps it was the loss of his previous tenant that made Frederick Kennedy decide to sell. Samuel Brown - an Inspector of National Schools - lived at first in 2 Sydenham Terrace. He must have preferred number 1, as in 1881 he bought it (in the indenture he is said at the time to live at Sydenham House, which is yet another house on the Terrace). Perhaps he just preferred a house on a corner, but perhaps he also saw an opportunity to enlarge it, which would not have been possible with number 2. Number 2 was then sold to Emma Hudson. Samuel Brown was thus the first 'owner occupier'. He died on 14 July 1886 at the age of 67 and left his property to his wife.

In 1891, we find his eldest son Samuel Lombard (born 1856) at the property. He was an Irish politician and barrister. He was an independent member of Seanad Éireann 1923-5 and 1926-36. He was elected at a by-election on 12 December 1923, replacing Sir Horace Plunkett, but lost his seat at the 1925 Seanad election. He was re-elected at a by-election on 10 February 1926, replacing Windham Wyndham-Quin. He was re-elected at the 1934 Seanad election and served until the Free State Seanad was abolished in 1936. He died 14 December 1939.

In the 1901 *Thom's Directory*, Samuel Lombard was still listed - the name now being 1 Sydenham Villas but the 1901 census records his two brothers, William Alcock Brown (43, widower) and John Richard Brown (41, single) living at the property. Samuel Lombard was then living with his family at Mount Street Upper. William followed in his father's footsteps and was a senior inspector at the Board of Education and John was a stock broker. In 1903, only the younger brother John Richard was mentioned as the resident of 1 Sydenham Villas in the *Thom's Directory* of that year. Samuel Lombard was still the owner, as he was the vendor of the house not much later. Perhaps he just allowed his brother(s) to live in the house until it was sold after he had moved to the Mount Street address.

In 1905 William Rowe Thomas, born in England around 1844, a member of the Church of Ireland, a commercial traveller and married to a wife 27 year his junior, owns the house. A Henry O'Connor is mentioned as landlord in the 1911 census, but this appears to be incorrect, as according to the legal documentation William R. Thomas was definitely the owner. However, there does seem to have been a claim on one fourth of the property. This claim went through several hands (O'Connor, Stapleton, Golden) until finally settled in 1930 by the Mortiers who would become owners of 1 Sydenham Villas in 1927. It is likely this was a boundary dispute. On the Ordnance Survey map of 1907 the house was shown as larger than its neighbours, whereas they were originally all the same size. It appears that the house was enlarged at some time between 1871 and 1907 - and appears to have strayed over the land boundary.

William R. Thomas lived in the property up to 1911. He died on 22 November 1913, leaving his properties worth £1,100 pounds to his widow Emily Anne. In the legal documentation, their address was 4 Churchill Terrace in Ballsbridge so it appears that they no longer lived in 1 Sydenham Villas. The property on Churchill Terrace was a lot smaller than the Dundrum property, so they might have 'traded down' when William was getting older (he was 67 in 1911).

However, the house at Sydenham Villas was not sold, but appears to have been rented out again. In 1915 Thomas Linnane lived in the property, but was never an owner. Thomas was the great grandfather of Joe Linnane. Joe Linnane was born in 1910 and presented the radio quiz *Question Time* for Radio Éireann in the 1940s. He was an actor, known for *The Woman in Question* (1950), *The Angel Who Pawned Her Harp* (1954) and *Hunted* (1952). He died on 28 September 1981 in Dublin.

And now for the gossip! In 1918, Robert Bates was living in the house. In 1927, Emily Anne Bates, presumably his wife, was the vendor of the house. It appears that she was the owner, and not her husband. There is no evidence however that the house was ever sold to Emily Anne Bates. It is known that William R. Thomas left the house in his will to his wife, called Emily Anne. In the 1911 census 67-year-old William was living in 1 Sydenham Villas with his 40-year old **wife²**, a servant and a boarder listed as a single, male, 39-year-old Robert M. Bates. There is a record of a Robert Murray Bates (born in Co. Carlow on 30 August 1871) marrying an Emily Anne Rudd (her maiden name, see endnote) in December 1914, about a year after William's death. This would explain Emily Anne's ownership. Emily died on 4 March 1930. Robert died on 20 September 1930.

Emily Anne Bates sold the house to Eugene Edward Mortier, his wife Annie and his daughter Edith Jane in September 1927. It was then that the name Gordonville was first used. Eugene was born about 1864 in the West Indies and was a marine engineer. Annie was born about 1860 in Bristol. They had three children, John (born about 1881 in Bristol), George Vincent (1893, born in Cardiff) and Edith Jane (born about 1889 in Cardiff). In 1901, the family lived in North Wall, Dublin, except for the oldest son John. George Vincent received a campaign medal for his service as a seaman in WWI. Edith Jane was a spinster and remained with her parents. It appears they had wanted to live out their retirement in 1 Sydenham Villas. It was however not to be for Eugene, as he died on 2 December 1927 - aged 64. His wife Annie lived to be 102, and died on 8 April 1958. Edith Mortier lived another 20 years in the big house.

In 1978 the house was sold again, this time to Michael and Jenny Hassett. They raised their three children, John, Gerry and Jillian there. Jillian became the second occupant of the house to become a member of Seanad Éireann, when she was appointed as an Independent senator by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny in 2011. Michael (who died on 21 November 2015) and Jenny Hassett had then already moved to a smaller property, their place being taken by the current owners, their son, daughter-in-law and family. NAMES REMOVED

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2 Ages in the census are quite often wrong. This appears to be the case here as at her death Emily Anne was 70, and thus born in 1860, which would make her at least 50 years old in 1911. This is also supported by a marriage record found between a William Rowe Thomas and an Emily Anne Rudd from 1877 in Borrisokane, Tipperary, which is where his wife hailed from according to the census records.

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