## The Montgomery Plantation in County Down.

An extract from Montgomery Manuscripts Ed. G.Hill (1873) Written by William Montgomery of Rosemount ca 1696-1706. This provides a contemporary view of the early settlement of Co Down.

"I now go on with Sir Hugh Montgomery's plantation, which began about May, 1606, and thus it was, viz.:-Sir Hugh, after his return from Ireland to Braidstane, in winter 1605, as he had before his coming into Ireland, spoken of the plantation, so now he conduced his prime friends to join him therein, viz:-John Shaw of Greenock, Esq. and Patrick Montgomery of Black House. Sir Hugh also brought with him Patrick Shaw, Laird of Kelsoland and Hugh Montgomery, a cadet of the family of Braidstane with many others, and gave them lands in fee farm in Donaghadee parish under small chief rents.

There came over also divers wealthy able men, to whom his lordship gave tenements in freehold, and parks by lease, so they being as it were bound, with their heirs, to the one, they must increase the rent for the other, at the end of the term or quit both which makes the park lands about towns give 10s. per acre rent now, which at the plantations the tenants had for 1s. rent, and these being taken, the tenants had some 2, some 3, and some 4 acres, for each of which they passed a boll of barley, rent. They built stone houses, and they traded to enable them to buy land, to France, Flanders, Norway. etc., as they still do.

I desire that this brief account may serve as a sampler of Sir Hugh's first essay to his plantation, for it would be tedious (as it would be impossible for me) to enumerate all the substantial persons whom he brought or who came to plant in Grey Abbey. Newtown, and corner parishes. Therefore let us now pause awhile, and we shall wonder how this plantation advanced itself (especially in and about the towns of Donaghadee and Newtown), considering that in the spring time (1606), those parishes were now more wasted than America (when the Spaniards landed there), but were not at all encumbered with great woods to be felled and grubbed, to the discouragement or hindrance of the inhabitants for in all those three parishes aforesaid, thirty cabins could not be found, nor any stone walls, but ruined roofless churches, and a few vaults at Grey Abbey, and a stump of an old castle in Newtown, in each of which some gentlemen sheltered themselves at their first coming over.

But Sir Hugh in the said spring brought with him divers artificers, as smiths, masons, carpenters, etc. I knew many of them old men when I was a boy at school, and had little employments for some of them, and heard them tell many things of this plantation which I found true. They soon made cottages and booths for themselves, because sods and saplings of ashes, alders, and birch trees (above thirty years old) with rushes for thatch, and bushes for wattles, were at hand. And also they made a shelter of the said stump of the castle for Sir Hugh, whose residence was mostly there, as in the centre of being supplied with necessaries from Belfast (but six miles thence), who therefore came and set up a market in Newtown, for profit for both the towns. As like wise in the fair summer season (twice, sometimes thrice every week) they were supplied from Scotland, as Donaghadee was oftener, because but three hours sail from Port Patrick, where they bespoke provisions and necessaries to lade in, to be brought over by their own or that town's boats whenever wind and weather served them, for there was a constant flux of passengers coming daily over.

I have heard honest old men say that in June, July, and August, 1607, people came from Stranraer, four miles, and left their horses at the port, hired horses at Donaghadee, came with their wares and provisions to Newtown, and sold them, dined there, stayed two or three hours, and returned to their houses the same day by bed-time, their land journey but twenty miles. Such was their encouragement from a ready market, and their kind desires to see and supply their friends and kindred, which commerce took quite away the evil report of wolves and wood-kerne, which enviers of planter's industry had raised and brought upon our plantations; but, notwithstanding thereof, by the aforesaid gentlemen's assiduity to people their own farms, which they did, (1607), after Sir Hugh and his Lady's example, they both being active and intent on the work (as birds, after pairing to make nests for their brood), then you might see streets and tenements regularly set out, and houses rising as it were out of the ground (like Cadmus's colony) on a sudden, so that these dwellings became towns immediately.

Yet among all this care and indefatigable industry for their families. a place of God's honour to dwell in was

1 of 2 11/12/2014 8:17 AM

not forgotten or neglected, for indeed our forefathers were more pious than ourselves, and so soon as [the] said stump of the old castle was so repaired (as it was in spring time, 1606), as might be shelter for that year's summer and harvest, for Sir Hugh and for his servants that winter, his piety made some good store of provisions in those fair seasons, towards roofing and fitting the chancel of that church, for the worship of God; and therein he needed not withdraw his own planters from working for themselves, because there were Irish Gibeonets and garrons (ponies) enough in his woods to hew and draw timber for the sanctuary; and the general free contribution of the planters, some with money, others with handicrafts, and many with labouring, was so great and willingly given, that the next year after this, viz. in 1607, before winter it was made decently serviceable, and Sir Hugh had brought over at first two or three chaplains with him for these parishes. In summer, 1608, some of the priory walls were roofed and fitted for his Lady and children and servants (which were many) to live in.

Now the harvests 1606 and 1607 had stocked the people with grain, for the lands were never naturally so productive since that time, except where no plough had gone, and where sea oar (called wreck) is employed for dung, to that degree that they had to spare and to sell to the succeeding new-coming planters, who came over the more in number and the faster because they might sell their own grain at a great price in Scotland, and be freed of trouble to bring it with them, and could have it cheaper here. This conference gave occasion to Sir Hugh's Lady to build water mills in all the parishes, to the great advantage of her house, which was numerous in servants, of whom she stood in need, in working about her gardens, carriages, etc., having then no duty days' work from tenants, or very few as exacted, they being sufficiently employed in their proper labour and the public. The millers also prevented the necessity of bringing meal from Scotland, and grinding with quairn stones (as the Irish did to make their graddon) both which inconveniencies the people, at their first coming, were forced to undergo.

Her Ladyship had also her farms at Grey Abbey and Comber, as well as at Newtown, both to supply newcomers and her house; and she easily got men for plough and barn, for many came over who had not stocks to plant and take leases of land, but had brought a cow or two and a few sheep, for which she gave them grass and so much grain per annum, and an house and garden plot to live on, and some land for flax and potatoes, as they agreed on for doing their work, and there be at this day many such poor labourers amongst us; and this was but part of her good management, for she set up and encouraged linen and woollen manufactory, which soon brought down the prices of the breakens and narrow cloths of both sorts.

Now everybody minded their trades, and the plough, and the spade, building, and setting fruit trees, etc, in orchards and gardens, and by ditching in their grounds. The old women spun,and the young girls plied their nimble fingers at knitting, and everybody was innocently busy. Now the golden peaceable age renewed, no strife, contention, querulous lawyers, or Scottish or Irish feuds, between clans and families, and surnames, disturbing the tranquillity of those times; and the towns and temples were erected, with other great works done (even in troublesome years) as shall be in part recited, when I come to tell you of the first Lord Viscount Montgomery's funeral, person, parts, and arts; therefore, reader,I shall be the more concise in the history of the plantation I find that in a few years from the beginning of the Plantation, viz. in A.D. 1610, the Viscount brought before the King's muster master 1,000 able fighting men to serve, when out of them a militia should be raised. The said Sir Hugh (for the great encouragement of planters and builders) obtained a patent dated the 25th of March, 11th Jac. by which Newtown aforesaid is erected into a corporation, whereof the said Sir Hugh is nominated the first Provost, and the burgesses are also named. "

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Reference material

2 of 2