



# Hillsborough, its History and Royal Associations

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*Cover image: Hillsborough from the air, ILC&LM Collection*

## Executive Summary

The historic town of Hillsborough is home to Hillsborough Castle, also known as Government House. Originally the residence of the Governor of Northern Ireland, Hillsborough Castle is the only residence of a sitting Secretary of State in the UK and the official residence of the Royal Family in Northern Ireland. Hillsborough Castle is the first Royal Palace in Ireland in over 800+ years of Anglo-Irish relations.

Today, the Castle acts as the State and the Crown's official civic and state space, where awards, investitures, and acts of reconciliation take place. Yet, Hillsborough's rich Royal links stretch far beyond the walls of Government House. And, for over 400 years the Hill/Downshire family, the founders of Hillsborough, have maintained strong and distinguished links with the Monarchy. Nowhere else on the island of Ireland can lay claim to such a sustained association with the Crown.

As we approach the centenary of Northern Ireland and Government House, and in the context of the area's long association with the Crown, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council are seeking to recognise this history with a Royal title.

This paper details a history of Hillsborough's rich Royal links and presents it for consideration by the Royal Names Team at the Cabinet Office.

## Timeline

- 1600* - Birth of Arthur Hill (1600-63), founder of Hillsborough
- 1660* - Charles II establishes Hillsborough Fort as a Royal Garrison
- 1662* - Hillsborough receives a Royal Charter
- 1690* - King William III stays overnight at Hillsborough Fort and the *Regium Donum* grant is renewed
- 1717* - Trevor Hill (1693-1742) is made Baron Hill of Kilwarlin and Viscount Hillsborough by King George I
- 1751* - George II makes Wills Hill (1718-1793), comptroller of the Royal Household, Earl of Hillsborough
- 1771* - Benjamin Franklin dined in Hillsborough
- 1789* - Wills Hill (1718-1793) is created Marquess of Downshire
- 1793* - The second Marquess leads the 'Royal Downshire'
- 1830* - *Cuideacht Gaeilge Uladh* (est. 1830) is part founded by the third Marquess
- 1831* - The third Marquess carries a ceremonial sword at William IV's coronation
- 1880/90s* - Arthur Hill, Comptroller of the Royal Household, manages the estate
- 1922* - Hillsborough Castle is bought by the government of Northern Ireland (NI)
- 1925* - 'Government House' is now official residence to the Governor of NI and the official residence of the monarch in NI
- 1932* - The Prince of Wales stays at Hillsborough on a state visit
- 1934* - Duke of Gloucester stays in Hillsborough, famously playing a Lambeg Drum
- 1937* - King George VI and Queen Elizabeth stay at Hillsborough
- 1942* - US First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visits Hillsborough
- 1945* - Princess Elizabeth stays at the Castle on her first solo trip
- 1953* - Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh welcomed to Hillsborough
- 1972* - Government House becomes home to the NI Secretary of State
- 1977* - The Queen took her first helicopter flight and stayed at Hillsborough
- 1984* - The first annual Royal Garden Party is held

*1985* - Anglo-Irish Agreement signed at Hillsborough

*1998* - Negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement held at the Castle

*2000* - President Bill Clinton is the first sitting US president to visit Hillsborough

*2001* - The Queen visits Hillsborough, and opens Lisburn's new Council Offices

*2003* - President Bush meets the British and Irish Prime Ministers at the Castle

*2005* - The Queen hosts Irish President Mary McAleese at Hillsborough

*2009* - All Ireland Rugby Team hosted at Hillsborough by The Queen

*2012* - The Duke of York visits the Castle

*2013* - The Earl of Wessex stays at Hillsborough

*2014* - Her Majesty The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh visit Government House, now managed by Historic Royal Palaces

*2015* - The Earl and Countess of Wessex stay at Hillsborough

*2016* - The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visit the Castle

*2017* - A visit from The Duke of Sussex

*2018* - HRH Princess Anne stays at Hillsborough Castle

*2019* - Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall stay at Hillsborough, now officially open following refurbishment

## **Hillsborough, its history and Royal associations**

Hillsborough is a 17th-century estate village, well known for its fine Georgian architecture, parkland and lakeside walks. Its Castle, formerly Government House, is the official residence of Her Majesty the Queen in Northern Ireland and now designated a royal palace. Hillsborough with its royal associations occupies a unique place in the history and affairs of Northern Ireland.

### ***The establishment of Hillsborough***

Hillsborough owes its name to the Hill family, which came to Ireland from Devon in England. It was, as has been remarked, the appropriately named Moses/Moyses Hill (d.c.1630) 'who led his descendants into the promised land' when he came to Ulster in the reign of Elizabeth I as a soldier in the service of the Crown. The Elizabethan conquest of Ulster at the beginning of the seventeenth century opened the way for Hill to establish his family as landowners in Castlereagh and Kilwarlin. He acquired a large estate from Con O'Neill of Castlereagh on which he built a fortified house, Hillhall (near Lisburn), where he died in 1630, and also, by purchase from Bryan Oge Maginnis in 1611, an estate at Kilwarlin which he expanded to include the whole area around the present Hillsborough.

### ***Hillsborough's early Royal links***

It was Moses Hill's younger son Arthur (1600-63) who established Hillsborough and was the first of the family to live there. Having inherited the Kilwarlin lands in 1655, he became a royalist in 1660 at the Restoration and was pardoned by Charles II for his Cromwellian dalliances during the interregnum. Arthur Hill had earlier rebuilt in stone a fort destroyed in the Irish Rebellion of 1641. The strategic importance of the fort and the land to the Crown was given Royal recognition in 1660. Following the Restoration, and by Letters Patent, Charles II established the Fort as a Royal Garrison and Arthur Hill and 'his heirs and assigns forever' were made Constables, with provision - including pay - for 24 warders.



The lands were further confirmed by the Crown in 1662 with the granting of Hillsborough's charter. The Kilwarlin estate was erected into the manor of Hillsborough and his village was made a corporate town with its own corporation and a parliamentary borough, hence its name: Hillsborough. This gave the town the right 'to elect' two MPs to the Irish Parliament, a right which it maintained until the Act of Union in 1801 when its borough status came to an end. Hill was also sworn onto the Irish Privy Council.

Arthur Hill, a close friend of Bishop Jeremy Taylor (1613-67) - appointed Bishop of Down and Connor in 1660 by Charles II - died in 1663 and was buried in a vault within the new church he had built on the site of the present parish church beside the Fort. From this time on Hillsborough was certainly the chief residence of the Hill family.



*Figure 1: The plaque attached to the outside wall of Hillsborough Fort reads: '6 FEET SOUTH EAST OF THIS SLAB THE REIGUM DONUM WAS SIGNED BY KING WILLIAM III OF GLORIOUS MEMORY TO THE PRESBYTERIAN BODY WHICH THEY WERE DEPRIVED'. Albert Bridge.*

Arthur's son William Hill (d.1693) received King William III there in June 1690, when the King rested overnight to marshal his forces before his advance southwards to meet James II at the Battle of the Boyne. The *Regium Donum* (See Figure 1) grant William III renewed to Irish Presbyterian clergy was made at the Fort and is



commemorated on an engraved stone still to be viewed beside a gateway approaching it. William III also made a grant to the Royal Down Corporation of Horse Breeders at the Maze, close to Hillsborough. The Corporation had been granted a charter in 1685 under King James II.

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century building works for a new Hill residence commenced close to the site of the present 'Castle' and continued into the early 18th century. This house though destroyed by fire in the late 1730s was described as 'a large noble house built within the area of regular fortification'. Like many Irish manor houses of the era it was built with one eye on its capacity for defence, hence the continuing use of the term castle to describe it. Its occupant in these early decades of the 18th century was Trevor Hill (1693-1742). In 1717 he was raised to the peerage of Ireland as Baron Hill of Kilwarlin and Viscount Hillsborough by King George I, the first important royal recognition of the Hill family's emerging status and the first step in the peerage ladder that would culminate in his son Wills Hill achieving the Marquessate of Downshire in 1789.

### *A Royal reward: the Marquessate of Downshire*

Wills Hill (1718-1793) who succeeded his father in 1742 as proprietor of the Hill estates was, above all, the creator of the Hillsborough we know today (see Figure 2). As a man of taste and discernment in architecture and town planning, the village owes its appearance and character to him, from the Georgian gothic parish church and the Fort gate lodge to the neo-classical market house in the Square before his mansion house 'the Castle'. If in his later years he spent most of his time in London as an ambitious courtier and politician, he never lost interest as an improving landlord in his Irish estates and his works at Hillsborough.



*Figure 2: Cast of bust of Wills Hill, Marquess of Downshire, cast of bust from Hillsborough Castle. Original by Joseph Nollekens (1737-1823). ILC&LM Collection.*

He should also be noted as a significant promoter of the linen industry both locally on his estates and nationally as a member of the Irish Linen Board. Lisburn, on the neighbouring Hertford estate, also benefited from his interest in the regulation of its brown linen market, and from the active encouragement and support he gave to William Coulson's damask manufactory in its early years. This celebrated Lisburn firm was soon to provide fine armorial damask table linens to the royal

household and was granted a Royal Warrant by King George III in 1811 (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3: Prince of Wales Napkin, woven by Coulsons, Lisburn and featuring the distinctive heraldic feathers of the Prince. ILC&LM Collection.*

As a courtier Hill was conspicuously successful. In 1751 he was created Earl of Hillsborough in the Irish peerage by George II who he served as comptroller of the Royal Household, and a few years later he entered the British House of Lords with an English barony, before eventually becoming Earl of Hillsborough in the British peerage in 1772. His final ennoblement by George III as Marquess of Downshire in the peerage of Ireland was his crowning achievement and befitted his status as the greatest landowner in the county and one of the largest in Ireland.

Lord Hillsborough's political career in London was, however, more controversial. After several posts in government he was created the first Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1768, a post he held for four years. He was subsequently blamed for

mishandling the American colonists and for not doing more, ‘through stubborn and destructive obstinacy’, to prevent the ensuing War of Independence. Certainly, his invitation to Benjamin Franklin, the great American statesman, to stay with him at Hillsborough did not lead to a meeting of minds, although they got on personally. Indeed, George III said of Lord Hillsborough ‘he did not know of a man of less judgement’.

Wills Hill’s successor Arthur Hill (1753-1801), the second Marquess, also enjoyed warm regard at Court, his sister was married to the Lord Chamberlain (1783-1804), the first Marquess of Salisbury. When an Irish Militia was established in 1793 the county Down regiment was styled the ‘Royal Downshire’ and its Colonelcy was given to him by the Crown. The second Marquess, through his opposition to the Act of Union in 1801, lost all political favour and was stripped of everything it was in the power of government to remove; treatment his widow believed hastened his early death in the same year. It was during his time that the main part of the present Hillsborough Castle was completed. His widow, a considerable heiress, created Baroness Sandys in her own right, eventually had the satisfaction of seeing her late husband’s political enemy Lord Castlereagh – the chief architect of the union – defeated in an 1805 county Down election in which she campaigned for a rival candidate. As a Whig she was at the time friendly with the Prince of Wales, the future Regent and George IV.

### *The Downshires in the nineteenth century*

Successive Marquesses thereafter in the nineteenth century did not engage at Court or in the affairs of the State on the same scale, though their importance to the Royal Family and ranking as among the wealthiest of Irish landlords continued to bring celebrity. For example, Jean Théodore Latour (1766-1837), pianist and composer to the Prince Regent, composed a divertimento for the pianoforte in honour of Hillsborough Castle and dedicated to the Marquis of Downshire during the

Regency era (1811-20). Of four copies in the world, one resides in the archive at Lisburn Museum (see Figure 4 ).

The Hillsborough estate was just one of several of the Downshire's holdings, they also had estates in Wicklow and King's County (now County Offaly). Management of the estates dominated much of successive Marquess of Downshire's time throughout the 1800s.

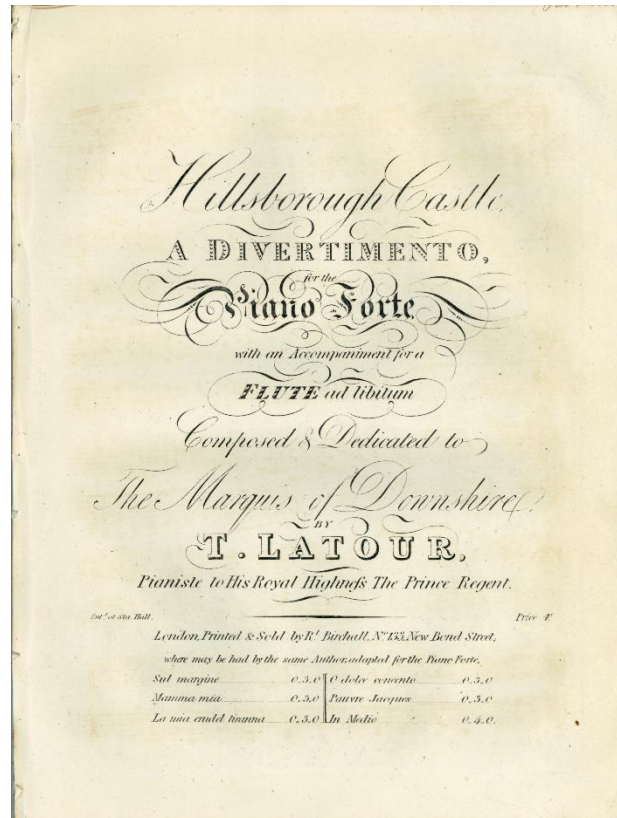


Figure 4: Latour's 'Hillsborough Castle'. ILC&LM Collection.

Arthur Hill (1788-1845), 3rd Marquess of Downshire, was an 'untypical Irish landlord' and was hugely involved in the running of his estate. He was interested in agricultural improvement, sponsored farming societies, subsidised drainage schemes, and took a keen interest in education, establishing several schools on the estate in Ulster. He was also an ardent supporter of the Irish language and Gaelic culture. An enthusiastic member of the *Cuideacht Gaeilge Uladh* or the *Ulster Gaelic Society* (est. 1830), Maria Edgeworth's (1768-1845) 'Forgive and Forget, a Tale' was translated into Irish by the society and dedicated to the 3rd Marquess '... as a sincere but inadequate token of their respect for the patriotic interest [he has]



taken in the resuscitation of our long lost national literature [and the] zeal shown for the promotion of education' (see Figure 5).

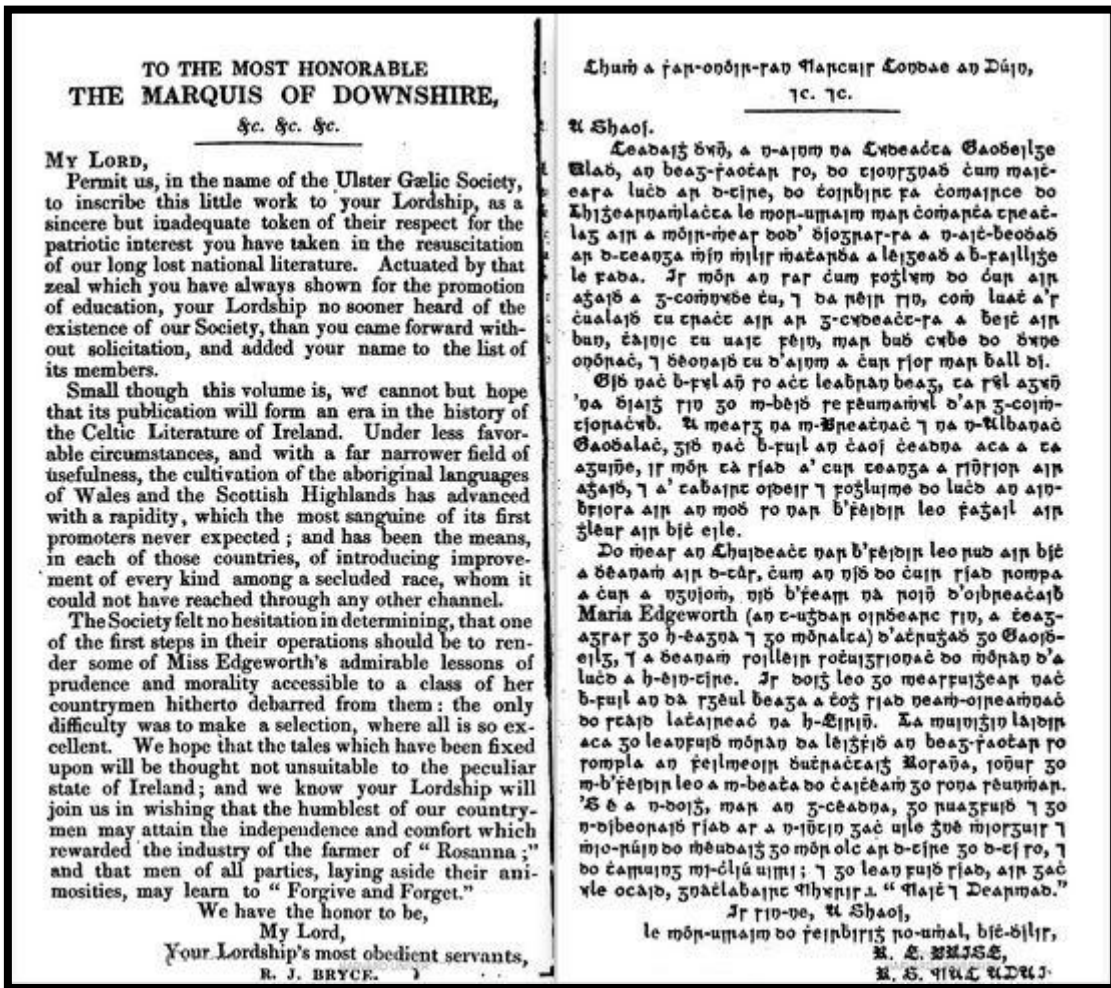


Figure 5: Dedication in English and Irish to the Marquess of Downshire, from Edgeworth's 'Forgive and forget, a tale', 1831. ILC&M Collection.

Although less involved in national politics than the first and second Marquesses, Arthur Hill carried a ceremonial sword at the coronation of William IV and was created a Knight of the Order of St Patrick (KP), the highest order of chivalry awarded by the crown in Ireland in the Throne Room of Dublin Castle in 1831. The third Marquess died in 1841 at Blessington, Wicklow, and his funeral cortege home to Hillsborough attracted huge crowds and was reported in the *Illustrated London News*. His tenants in Hillsborough admired his improving zeal and later subscribed to the erection of a pillar-style monument outside the village, an imposing landmark visible for miles around. His brother, Lord George Hill (1801-

79) was one-time Comptroller of the Household to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Royal representative in Ireland during William IV's reign (1830-37). He owned estates in Donegal and spoke Irish.

The coming of age of the fourth Marquess (1812-68) and his marriage were marked by popular rejoicing by the tenantry, most notably in feasts held for several thousand at tables laid out within the Fort. During the Great Famine he was marked for his compassion and in stark contrast to his near neighbour in south Antrim, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Hertford (1800-70).

The fifth and sixth Marquess, however, saw little of Hillsborough during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Presence in the Castle was maintained by Lord Arthur William Hill (1846-1931) a younger brother of the fifth Marquess who represented county Down in parliament as a unionist as well as managing the affairs of the estate. Perhaps the least well-known estate manager, he had a distinguished career as a soldier and - highlighting the continuing links between the Downshires and the Royal family - served as Comptroller of the Royal Household on three occasions. This position was previously held by Wills Hill (1718-1793), the first Marquess.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, and as a result of the land acts, Irish landowners lost their former power in national and local politics and Hillsborough Castle was even let out as the Hill family preferred to live in other houses on their estates in England. In the early twentieth century the castle was let out, notably to Sir Thomas Dixon the High Sheriff of County Down, and then vacated in 1919.



*A castle becomes a house: Hillsborough and the founding of Northern Ireland*

Hillsborough Castle found a new and most distinguished role in 1922 when it was purchased from Lord Downshire. Hillsborough Castle, ‘once the residence of one of Ireland’s greatest landowning families’, was re-named ‘Government House’ and re-purposed as the official residence of the Governor of the newly created Northern Ireland (1921) and thus the venue for royal and official state ceremonies.

*The role of Governor*

The Lord Lieutenant had been the chief governor of Ireland since the 17th century and had an official residence at the Vice-Regal lodge in Phoenix Park, Dublin. The Lord Lieutenant’s role as the monarch’s representative in Ireland was hugely important and there was no equivalent office in Scotland and Wales. The office was invested with responsibility for the civil government of the country and, at least nominally, the Crown naval and military forces. Reflecting the stature of the former office of Lord Lieutenant, it is worth considering that the Lord Lieutenant’s former home in Phoenix Park is now Áras an Uachtaráin, the official residence of the President of Ireland (created 1937).

In the new state of Northern Ireland the Governor was the principal officer and representative of the monarch. The office assumed the same status and importance over Northern Ireland as the historic office of Lord Lieutenant in Ireland (abolished in 1921 as a result of the Anglo-Irish Treaty) and was equivalent to Governors-General in the likes of Canada and New Zealand. The office of Governor was established as a ‘symbol of the permanence of both the authority of the Northern Government and of the union with Great Britain’.



*Figure 6: Lord and Lady Erskine at Hillsborough. ILC&LM Collection.*

The Governor had possession of the Great Seal of Northern Ireland and gave Royal assent on the monarch's behalf to acts passed by the Northern Ireland parliament. Government House, Hillsborough Castle, served a dual function as the Governors' residence as well as the official residence of the monarch in Northern Ireland. From 1922 on governors often welcomed royal visitors to stay in Hillsborough when making official or private visits to the province.

The Duke of Abercorn (1869-1953) was Northern Ireland's first Governor (serving 1922-1945). His grandfather, Marquess of Abercorn, had twice served as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Royal representative in Ireland. The Duke, great grandfather to Diana, Princess of Wales (a visitor to Hillsborough in 1992) took up residence at the refurbished Hillsborough Castle, now Government House, in late 1925. He was succeeded, in turn, by The Earl Granville (1945-52); The Lord Wakehurst (1952-64); The Lord Erskine of Rerrick (1964-68) and then The Lord Grey of Naunton (1968-73).

The office of Governor, as academic James Loughlin has suggested, was used to cement ties between the monarchy and the fledgling state of Northern Ireland. Therefore, Government House, as a backdrop, has played an important role in the forging of a Northern Irish identity within the Union. As part of this, Government House became the venue for much of the new province's official ceremony.

### *Royal Visits to Government House*

Among the first royal visitors during the governorship of the Duke of Abercorn (1922-45) were the royal princes, the sons of King George V: the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Gloucester. The Prince of Wales, the future Duke of Windsor, came to Northern Ireland in November 1932 to open the new Parliament Buildings at Stormont and from Government House he also undertook other visits such as that made to Hilden Mill in Lisburn on the 18 November 1932. The popularity of royal residence in Hillsborough was evidenced by large crowds who cheered outside the gates and by royal engagement with those who demonstrated the playing of Lambeg Drums. In its collection the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum has two such drums: 'the Prince' and 'the Duke'. Indeed, on a visit to Northern Ireland in May 1934 to open the King's Hall, Balmoral, the Duke of Gloucester thrilled his audience by trying his hand at playing a Lambeg in the Square at Hillsborough and later 'graciously assented' to having his portrait painted on it. The same year Hillsborough Castle was badly damaged by fire. Of the many objects in the historic castle threatened by fire the Duke of Abercorn was most concerned for the fate of a marshal's baton he 'held dear' and had carried at the coronation of Edward VII in 1902

The largest crowd of people Hillsborough had ever seen thronged its square and streets to witness and celebrate the arrival of the newly crowned King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on 28 July 1937. The King and Queen were undoubtedly

touched by their rapturous welcome. The King was the first reigning monarch to stay in Hillsborough since William III, almost 250 years before.

Throughout the ensuing dark years of the Second World War the royal family did not attempt to travel to Northern Ireland but following VE Day the King and Queen came again in June 1945 as part of a victory tour of all parts of the United Kingdom. As in 1937 they also visited Lisburn where they received a warm welcome in Market Square.

Hillsborough enjoyed several Royal Visitors in summer 1945. The princess Royal visited in June, inspecting the Women's Section of the Hillsborough British Legion. In July, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth stayed with the Duke of Abercorn, at Hillsborough. The Royals flew into Long Kesh, Lisburn; this was the Princess' first trip on an airplane, and during her trip - her first to Northern Ireland - the Princess met youth organisations lined along the avenue of Wallace Park in Lisburn. The King and Queen enjoyed socialising with local Lambeg drummers, or 'Lambeggars', in front of Government House, even sharing a toast with some local men. During the trip The King invested the Duke of Abercorn with the Royal Victorian Chain in a ceremony at the Castle. The chain is only awarded to individuals 'who have served her or the Monarchy in a personal way'.

As the new Governor of Northern Ireland the fourth Earl Granville (1945-52) was a brother-in-law of HRH Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother (1900-2002). The period following the war saw several informal visits by the Queen to Hillsborough to visit her sister, the Lady Granville. On one of these, in 1951, the Queen and Princess Margaret also visited Market Square Lisburn to be met by members of the Urban District Council, but Hillsborough remained the place where members of the royal family stayed in a relaxed atmosphere among the inhabitants who often welcomed their arrival and witnessed their departure or attendance at the parish church on Sundays.

In July 1953 on a post coronation tour Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh came to Northern Ireland to stay in Hillsborough (See Figure 7, below) and appropriately, to maintain a tradition established by her late father George VI, visit Market Square, Lisburn. Optimism was in the air at the beginning of a new 'Elizabethan Age'. In welcoming Queen Elizabeth II to Hillsborough The Lord Wakehurst (1952-64) declared a public holiday. By 1967 the Castle had hosted nearly 90 Royal visits.



*Figure 7: Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip greeting local Lambeg drummers at Hillsborough during their Coronation Tour, 1953.*

Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip visited Lisburn again in July 1966 and held a garden party in the grounds of Government House. Also in the grounds, the Duke of Edinburgh enjoyed a separate meeting with the local Hillsborough inventor Rex McCandless who demonstrated in flight a number of his gyro-plane models one of which, to his embarrassment, crashed before take-off, but to the Duke's relief without injury to the pilot.

Throughout The Troubles, Hillsborough Castle, the official residence of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland since 1972, remained a secure and

welcoming house for members of the royal family to enjoy on official visits. At the Silver Jubilee of her reign, Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh flew into Hillsborough by helicopter to host a garden party and inspect a guard of honour mounted by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. Fourteen years later, in 1991 the Queen returned to present new colours to the regiment at its barracks in Lisburn on the occasion of its merger with the Royal Irish Rangers to form the Royal Irish Regiment.

Regular visits to Northern Ireland and Hillsborough Castle have also been made by the Prince of Wales, the Princess Royal, the Duke of York and the Earl of Wessex, with such visits becoming more informal and much less governed by security restrictions following the ending of The Troubles and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Prince Charles visits annually, and the Castle acts as his private residence. ‘Hillsborough’, the Prince claimed in April 2019, ‘has always been a special place’.

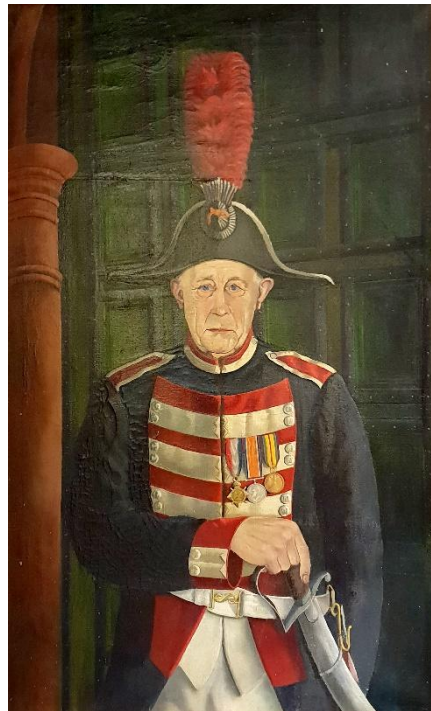
One of Her Majesty the Queen’s most significant visits to the area in the aftermath of the Agreement involved her visit, along with the Duke of Edinburgh, to open Lisburn Borough Council’s new Island Civic Centre in November 2001. The following year by Letters Patent she conferred on the Borough of Lisburn – which included the old pre-Act of Union, Borough of Hillsborough – the status of a city. Central to Lisburn Borough’s application for City Status was the fact that the Borough was home to Hillsborough Castle, the official residence of the Royal Family in Northern Ireland. Indeed, Hillsborough Castle is the only Royal residence in Northern Ireland and the first Royal Palace managed by Historic Royal Palaces outside of both London and England. Further, its dual role as the residence of the Northern Ireland Secretary of State is unique; the Secretaries of State in Scotland and Wales do not have official residences.

On a local level, many Hillsborough schoolchildren have fond memories of trips from the classroom up to Government House, or to the streets surrounding the Castle, to greet Royal visitors as they arrived in Hillsborough. There was great fondness for one local man's car. Fred Johnston drove a car purchased from the Royal household around the village. Having formerly been part of the Royal Fleet, it had carried Her Majesty the Queen and other members of the Royal Family when they visited Northern Ireland. In 1951 the local Hillsborough Brass Band treated HRH Queen Elizabeth to a concert on the front lawn of the Castle. Underscoring the relaxed nature of the Royal Family's visit to Government House The Queen joined the conductor John Harvey, a local van driver, on the lawn to discuss the music. Earlier she had planted a tree in the grounds of the Castle.

Proof of the Royal Family's enduring link with the village is evident in the parish church of St Malachy's. Described as one of the 'finest eighteenth-century churches in Ireland', it commands an imposing position in the heart of village. Within the building 'The Governor's Pew' is reserved for members of the Royal Family when they attend Divine Service in the church. Nearby, also, is The State Chair. This was taken from the Chapel Royal in Dublin Castle, where it was used by Ireland's Lord Lieutenant, the representative of the Crown. Today is kept 'in order that it may be used in the Church in the Parish of Hillsborough wherein the Representative of the Queen of England is wont to worship.' Nothing, however, captures the close connection between the Downshire, Hillsborough and the Royal Family than a 48-inch long silver mace dated 1786 that sits on the Corporation Pew during services. Made by the London-based silversmith Charles Aldrige, the mace 'bears the arms of the Royal Family, the town, Ireland the Downshire Family'. In 1951 HRH Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother presented the church with a bible from the library in Windsor Castle to commemorate her regular visits. And, finally, in 1955 a clock belonging to the HRH Queen Mother was auctioned at a Hillsborough parish garden party to raise funds to restore the church.



A unique, and very visible, connection to the monarchy in Northern Ireland is the continuing presence of the Hillsborough Warder in the town (see Figure 8: Private John Green (1865-1954), Hillsborough Guard. ILC&LM.). Again, established in 1660 when the Hills were made constables of the fort, the warders – or Castlemen, as they were known locally – have been a constant presence for nearly four hundred years. In the twentieth century they guarded King Edward VII in 1903 during his visit to the North of Ireland Horse Show, and accompanied Princess Mary, daughter of King George V and Queen Mary, during her visit to Northern Ireland, and extended stay at Hillsborough in 1928. Warders greeted the Duke of Gloucester in 1934 during his visit to the town. Sam Atkinson, the 80-year old bugler - described as ‘the last of the Old Castle Guard’ - sounded the ‘fall in’ for the Duke’s attendance at Sunday Service at Hillsborough Parish Church. Similarly, in 1951 he ‘sounded the call’ as HRH Queen Elizabeth and Princess Elizabeth, the future Queen, attended Sunday Service in the church. Although, today, only a single bugler is retained on staff at the Fort, the important ceremonial role of greeting members of the Royal Family on visits to Hillsborough remains.



*Figure 8: Private John Green (1865-1954), Hillsborough Guard. ILC&LM.*

Unique to Hillsborough, the Castle regularly joins other Royal Palaces in marking Royal anniversaries and birthdays with a 'bang'. A special Royal occasion is marked by a 21-gun salute on the south terrace of the Castle. The latest, in November 2019, saluted HRH Prince Charles' birthday. Hillsborough Church also maintain a local tradition of marking significant anniversaries associated with the Royal Family through their enthusiastic bell ringing from the bell tower.

Finally, each Royal visitor to Hillsborough plants a tree in the grounds of the Castle, and the act is commemorated on a silver plaque attached to a spade. To date, Historic Royal Palaces have four spades in their collection, richly decorated with these mementos.

*Royal residence and seat of civic power*

The historian of Hillsborough John Barry notes that in the creation of the Governorship and Government House the castle quickly became the ‘centre of affairs’ in Northern Ireland. The town became ‘a meeting place of not only men and women of distinction in the worlds of art and literature and politics, but also people drawn from every kind of occupation and pursuit in the local community.’ Historic Royal Palaces argue that ‘Hillsborough is viewed by some as a politically neutral venue’. And, while this may be debated, Hillsborough has been an important backdrop to many hugely significant civic, political and community acts that cut across communities in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the role of Hillsborough and its castle as a civic space is perhaps its most important function, particularly since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

In the House of Lords Baron Alderdice, former speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly and one-time leader of the cross-community Alliance Party (1987-1998), has highlighted the significance of Hillsborough to both unionists and nationalists in Ireland, particularly since ‘the extraordinary – indeed, transformational – effect of Her Majesty’s visit to the Republic of Ireland’ in 2011 (HL Deb, 11 December 2013). Hillsborough Castle, he claimed, ‘is not only a royal residence but a place of enormous political significance on the island of Ireland.’

Indeed, Hillsborough has hosted several significant talks and agreements relating to the Northern Ireland peace process, notably the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, negotiations around the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, and the 2010 Hillsborough Castle Agreement. Significantly, Her Majesty The Queen hosted Irish President Mary McAleese at the Castle in 2005. The visit was the first time a reigning monarch had met with a head of an independent Ireland on the island of Ireland. In 2014 Her Majesty The Queen held a private one-to-one meeting with the Irish republican Martin McGuinness then Deputy First Minister

of Northern Ireland, at Hillsborough, and again in 2016. Their meetings have been viewed as hugely important steps towards reconciliation in Northern Ireland and serves to underline the castle's important function as a state residence and symbolic venue for strengthening community relations.

Hillsborough and the Royal family have also been front and centre in fostering community relations through civic receptions. For example, in 2008 representatives from the cross-community Belfast Cúchulainns hurling team were received by Her Majesty the Queen at the Castle, and then later by President of Ireland Mary McAleese at Áras an Uachtaráin, Dublin. More recently HRH Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall 'played referee for a 'symbolic match' between young rugby and Gaelic football players'. While in 2015 the Royal Family, again represented by HRH Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall, took significant steps at Hillsborough to show their support for the differing traditions in Northern Ireland by hosting an evening of traditional Irish and Ulster-Scots music, poetry and dance.

One of the most conspicuous acts of cross-community support by the Royal Family took place in 2009, following the Irish Rugby team's Grand Slam victory in the Six Nations. The Ireland Rugby Team met Her Majesty the Queen at a reception at the Castle. The function was, as the *Irish Times* reported, 'Northern Ireland's official recognition of the joy and pride that erupted on both sides of the border when Ireland clinched that thrilling sporting win.'

Government House has become well known for hosting important guests of the state, as well as ministerial receptions, informal charitable events and large 'society' garden parties. Since 1984, approximately 2000 guests 'drawn from a wide cross-section of Northern Irish society, including the voluntary and community sectors, local charities, youth organisations and wider civil society' have been invited annually to the Garden Party, hosted by the Secretary of State, and attended by a

member of the Royal family. Recent guest of honour include The Duke of York (2012); The Earl of Wessex (2013); Her Majesty The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh (2014); The Earl and Countess of Wessex (2015); The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (2016); The Duke of Sussex (2017) and HRH Princess Anne (2018).

Several significant state banquets have also been held in the castle. Notably during Queen Elizabeth's Coronation tour in 1953, or in 2008 with Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Irish Taoiseach Brian Cowen and Northern Ireland First Minister Ian Paisley. Hillsborough has also played host to some of the most-highest profile visitor to the north. Benjamin Franklin dined in Hillsborough in 1771, and over 170 years later, during WWII, Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), First Lady of the United States of America, visited the castle and met the Governor, the Duke of Abercorn, before greeting American troops stationed nearby. President Bill Clinton was the first sitting president to visit Northern Ireland and Hillsborough Castle in 2000. This was closely followed, in April 2003, by President George W Bush who met British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern to discuss the peace process in Northern Ireland. Other high-profile state guests include Princess Diana (1992), Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama (2000).



*Figure 9: A relaxed Duke of Edinburgh meeting local recipients of the Duke of Edinburgh Award at Hillsborough, 2017. NIO.*

Hillsborough Castle's role as the seat of the Royals in Northern Ireland and the site of civic and symbolic power, is evident in the hosting of regular investitures. These include awards for civic and military service, including BEMs, OBEs, MBEs - HRH Prince Charles personally presented a range of cross-community awards in the Throne Room of the Castle in 2014, while HRH Prince Philip awarded several Duke of Edinburgh Gold Awards at the Castle in 2017 (see Figure 9). Community and voluntary organisations, involved work across Northern Ireland, have also received recognition at the Palace.

### *Conclusion*

Historic Hillsborough and its Castle, more than anywhere else in Northern Ireland or, indeed, on the island of Ireland, can lay claim to a sustained association with the Monarchy. This link is fostered, firstly, through the Hill family's historic royal connections maintained over generations through the Tudor, Stuart, Hanoverian and now Windsor dynasties. Secondly, through Hillsborough Castle's unique function as both Government House and a Royal Palace. It is worth stressing that the Castle is the only, and has been the only, Royal Palace on the Island of Ireland, and the only residence of a sitting Secretary of State; there is no equivalent elsewhere. Thirdly, and finally, Hillsborough and the Castle's role as a civic and state space, separate and distinct from the local political sphere and Stormont, sets it apart.

Today, Hillsborough is synonymous with the Royal Family, and its importance is felt in this 'new, new Elizabethan age', where her Majesty the Queen and the Royal family are increasingly undertaking a peace-building role. As we approach the centenary of Government House, and over 400 years of long and distinguished associations with the Crown and the area, it seems appropriate to mark this.