

MAUSOLEA IN ULSTER

Ian Johnson

To most observers, Northern Ireland (or at least Belfast) conjures up images of small Victorian streets populated by people intent upon violence and destruction, motivated by a hatred of their neighbours. Northern Ireland is therefore not normally on the list of destinations when considering holidays or even a short break. This would be true for most citizens of Great Britain, but tourism is becoming increasingly popular in the Province, particularly among visitors from France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Indeed, (I've discovered) intrepid Dutchmen and Germans with an interest in fishing kept coming to places such as the magically beautiful lakelands of County Fermanagh, even during the so-called 'Troubles'. Having spent three long weekends over the last two years in the Six Counties of Ulster that comprise Northern Ireland I can state that to avoid the country is an enormous mistake, for it is full of wonderful buildings not least of which are its mausolea. Furthermore, I have met many civilised and agreeable persons wholly unlike the types portrayed by the British and other media: indeed, I saw virtually nothing of those types at all.

On my first visit I was taken to the parish-churchyard at Knockbreda (now in a suburb of Belfast) to see three of the most attractive mausolea in Northern Ireland. Long neglected, like most mausolea from the eighteenth century and later, they stood forlornly in the churchyard, their roofs festooned with plants which could so easily have been removed but which were adding to the decay by taking root and pushing the stones apart. It was a melancholy sight, but on my last visit two of the three (all dating from the 1790s) were surrounded by scaffolding, as funds have been raised by The Follies Trust (see details below) to repair them. The Greg and Rainey mausolea will, if all goes to plan, be restored to their full splendour within a couple of years. The third, the Waddell Cunningham Douglas mausoleum, will have to wait for more money to be collected. A member of the Greg family has recently been contacted, and lent support for the restoration which has added to the general enthusiasm.



The Waddell Cunningham Douglas Mausoleum waits patiently for its restoration



Work on Greg and Rainey proceeds.

As in Great Britain, responsibility for mausolea varies. In many cases families have long ago lost interest in maintaining their tombs, memorials, and mausolea, even if they still have access to funds. The elegant Classical Templetown Mausoleum (below) at Templepatrick, County Antrim (erected in 1768 by his widow in memory of the Honourable Arthur Upton), however, is now cared for by The National Trust and is remarkably good condition, although some vegetation needs to be removed to prevent further damage to the fine ashlar work of which the building is constructed. It was designed by Robert Adam, no less, is decorated



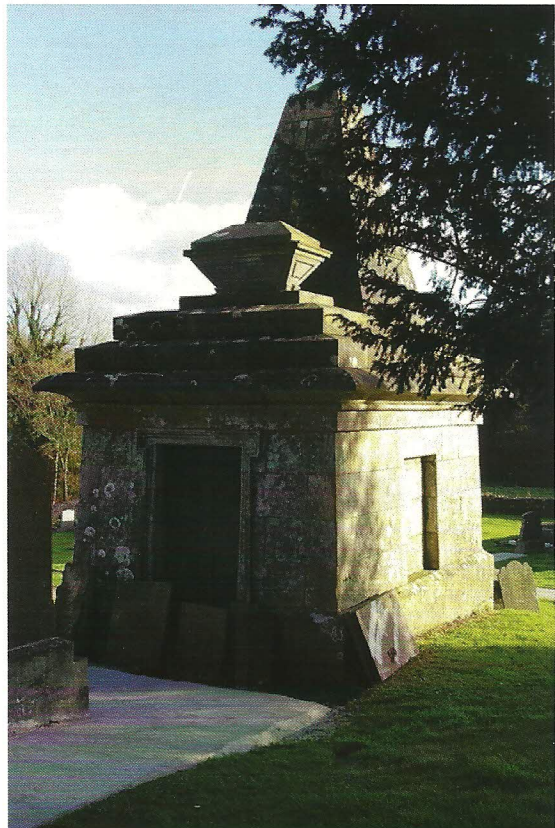
The Templetown Mausoleum at Templepatrick, by Adam

with two Classical roundels, and embellished with an urn and two ash-chests. Solidly built, it dominates a small graveyard close to the Upton family home Castle Upton (The wonderfully named Clotworthy Upton was elevated to the peerage in 1776 as Baron Templetown and his son, John Henry was created Viscount Templetown in 1806). Adam also designed the alterations to Castle Upton and was responsible for the castellated stables which are now restored and in use as attractive dwellings.

The parish-churchyard at Desertcreat, County Tyrone, is of considerable interest. South of the church, by the vestry door, is an early eighteenth-century stone slab decorated with a raised crozier and mitre, but there are also two large mausolea among the tombs. The first, in a commanding position on high ground, is that of the Greer family dating from 1840. It is of a Neo-Classical cubic form. Atop is a stumpy obelisk, and over the entrance is a large ash-chest. The style of the architecture has an Egyptian flavour, a curious rarity in the rolling Ulster countryside (see below).



Egyptian style Greer mausoleum



The second is less interesting architecturally. Dating from 1787, it is the place of entombment of the Lowry family, many of whom were clergymen : it is sited on low ground to the north-west of the Greer tomb, has a front in a simple Classical style, and set into the wall are plaques listing the names of those whose bodies lie in it.

Not far away, also in County Tyrone, the Burges family lived at Parkanaur, near Castlecaulfield (usually mis-spelled thus, as it is actually the family name of the Caulfeild family, who were granted the lands in the early part of the 17th century, and who became Earls of Charlemont). John Henry Burges, who had made a fortune in the East India Company, purchased the estate in the 1770s. In 1839, his son, John Ynyr Burges, who had inherited property in England, re-cased the house and added a new wing in 1843: he chose as his architect a local man, Thomas Duff of Newry, who made a delightful job of his commission in a late-Tudor style, with many chimneys and gables. The charming court with stables and offices was added around 1870, and a plaque records the fact that it was erected by John Ynyr and the Lady Caroline Burges without placing any debt upon the property AD 1870: (this refers to the uncertainty of the Irish Land Acts that were coming in from that time). Indeed, the Burges family moved out some time ago, and the delightful house in its pleasant grounds is now occupied by a charitable trust devoted to rehabilitating disabled people, although the splendid courtyard buildings are showing signs of disrepair, and will need attention if they are not to succumb to time and the elements.



Burges family mausoleum at Castle Caulfield

The Burges family mausoleum (left) is sited on high ground at the east end of the parish-churchyard of St Michael's Anglican Church (of Ireland), and there are members of the family buried near the south porch. The parish-church itself is well-maintained, and is itself of considerable interest, having a 17th-century Gothic Revival traceried window on the south side, and, within, a monument to George Walker (1645/6-90), the clergyman who was a significant figure in the defence of the City of Londonderry, and who perished at the Battle of the Boyne on 1 July 1690.

The saddest sight on the most recent visit was the Stephenson mausoleum (built in 1837) in the Presbyterian graveyard at Kilbride, County Antrim (see below). It is exotic, in a style of architecture which apparently owes much to the Moghul funerary buildings of the Indian Sub-Continent, but yet incorporating something of the spirit of Brighton Pavilion. It stands high, overlooking the lush valley of the Six Mile Water, and commemorates four Ulster medical men: Samuel Martin Stephenson (d.1833 aged 91) of Belfast; his namesake (d.1834 aged 50), who was Superintending Surgeon, Madras Presidency; George Alexander Stephenson, surgeon of the 3rd Dragoon Guards (d. 1864 aged 76); and Robert Stephenson (d.1869 aged 75) of Belfast. Still quite sound, it has sadly not seen the hand of a builder or repairer for many years: its pinnacles are tottering, its crenellations are becoming displaced, and its spectacular dome is threatened with vegetation which is forcing the stones apart. It desperately needs care and attention: even its wrought-iron door (made by a local blacksmith at Doagh, and signed) is rusting away.



The Stephenson Mausoleum at Kilbride

Although not visited on my last trip, my favourite tomb is the strangely opulent Murland Mausoleum at Clough in County Down. Half-hidden behind the hefty Classical-fronted First Presbyterian Church, it crouches low, half-mausoleum, half-vault, exuding, as James Stevens Curl, one of the MMT's patrons, has remarked, something of the 'fat atmosphere' of nineteenth-century funerals. It is still maintained, but by whom I was unable to establish. Remarkably open in its design, the coffins are clearly visible inside and are in good

condition, again completely unvandalised. No visit to Northern Ireland should omit this.

The Follies Trust, the equivalent of the MMT for Northern Ireland, is now working hard to raise awareness of the heritage provided by these mausolea and of the parlous state of many of them. The Trust was founded only three years ago but is already making an impact as a focus for the preservation of these wonderful but largely ignored buildings

The reader may also care to look at the gazetteer on the MMT's website where some of the mausolea mentioned in this article are shown.

As a final footnote, some time ago The Follies Trust offered to host a visit to Northern Ireland. Perhaps it is time to take up this invitation? The author is up for it.

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The Rainey mausoleum, restoration complete (Summer 2009)

For The Follies Trust contact Mrs Edward Wilson, Marlacoo House, 146 Marlacoo Road, Portadown, Craigavon, County Armagh BT62 3TD. More photos of the work at Knockbreda are on its website www.follies-trust.org

One of our Patrons, James Stevens Curl, helped to launch this Trust with two lectures: one was given at Dublin Castle and the other at Knockbreda Parish Church.