

CENTENARY OF SEAHAM HARBOUR

The Founding of the Town and Port

*Extract from Seaham Weekly News
Friday, November 30th 1928*

The founding of Seaham Harbour by Charles William Vane, third Marquess of Londonderry, and his wife, Frances Anne, is an interesting story from many points of view. Each of the parties was an outstanding figure and both played their parts with great ability, and although during her widowhood, when she carried on alone, she displayed unusual business acumen, the Marchioness, according to records in existence, was always ready to give credit to her husband.

The Marquess, who was born in 1778, was the second son of the first Marquess of Londonderry, an Irish peer. Adopting the Army as a profession, he rendered distinguished service with the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsula War, rose to the rank of general and received a knighthood, and later acted as British Ambassador at Vienna. In 1814 he was raised to the peerage of the United Kingdom as Baron Stewart. He married in 1804 a daughter of the Earl of Darnley, who died in 1812, and by her had a son, Frederick William.



*Frances Anne
Marchioness of Londonderry*

In 1819 he married Lady Frances Anne Emily, only daughter and heiress of Sir Henry Vane-Tempest of Wynyard and Longnewton, and his eldest son of this marriage was George Henry Robert Charles William, born in 1821.

The Vane-Tempests were the representatives of the ancient Durham family of Wynyard, and the Vanes of Longnewton, and were possessed of considerable estates and colliery property in the mid Durham district. The Lady Frances Anne's mother was the Countess of Antrim.

At the time of the marriage, Charles William was Lord Stewart, but he succeeded as third Marquess of Londonderry in 1822, on the death of his half-brother, Robert Stewart, second Marquess, better known as Viscount Castlereagh, who was Foreign Secretary during the closing years of the war against Napoleon. Meanwhile the Seaham estate had been purchased by Lord and Lady Stewart in 1821. Lord Stewart, on his marriage had assumed the name of Vane and in 1823 he was created Earl Vane and Viscount Seaham, with remainder to his heirs made by his second wife.

His eldest son by his second marriage, George Henry Robert Charles William, was known as Viscount Seaham until his father's death, upon which he became Earl Vane, a title which he held until the death of Frederick William, the fourth marquess (son of Charles William by his first wife),

when he became fifth marquess. It was the purchase of Seaham estate from Sir Ralph Milbanke, father of Lady Byron, which led to the founding of Seaham Harbour. Lady Frances Anne had already a big colliery business from pits in the vicinity of Durham, and in the Rainton and Pittington districts.

In Garbutt's history of Sunderland (1819), out of 212,556 chaldrons of coal shipped from the Wear in the second six months of 1818, Lady Frances Anne Vane Tempest's collieries contributed 54,256 chaldrons, being only beaten by the collieries of Mr John George Lambton, with 58,040 chaldrons.

Lord and Lady Londonderry, before starting their new port, had considerably developed their coal industry, and in 1827 their enterprises at Pittington, Rainton and Penshaw were visited by the Duke of Wellington, Lord Londonderry's old army chief.

The idea of the port of Seaham was for Lord Londonderry to have his own harbour for his own coal, and to construct a railway from his coalfield to the place of shipment. Friday, Nov. 28th, 1828, was the day appointed for the laying of the foundation stones of the new harbour and town, and we are told in old records, that "an immense concourse of people" assembled to witness the ceremony. "There was not a house nor a path on these rugged cliffs," wrote Lady Londonderry some years later in a book.

The nearest village was the old hamlet of Seaham, near the Hall and St. Mary's Church, and these buildings and many of the farm houses in the neighbourhood were decorated with flags. There was a distinguished company, so the accounts state, whose arrival was announced by a salute of 19 guns. The chief figures in the proceedings, were let down to the site of the harbour in a carriage which ran on the wagon way, this vehicle having been constructed for the Duke of Wellington when he visited the collieries the previous year. It was known as the "Wellington Car."

Lord Londonderry laid the foundation stone of the harbour and was presented by his agent, Mr John Buddle, of Wallsend, with a silver trowel, the handle of which was formed of polished Rainton coal. A brass plate was deposited along with the stone, bearing a suitable inscription. The engineer was Mr William Chapman.



This rock in the centre of the inlet which was to become the North Dock was blown up on 28th Nov 1828.

The company afterwards proceeded to the spot where the foundation stone of the first house of "Seaham town" was to be laid. This stone was laid by Viscount Seaham (Lord Londonderry's eldest son by his second marriage), who was only seven years old, and who received from Mr John Dobson, architect, a silver trowel with handle of polished Seaham limestone. Lord Seaham's reply was a delightful one for a child of such tender years. It was "Mr Dobson, I thank you, I cannot make a speech, but I wish success to the town and the people happy."

A brass plate was placed in the foundation stone of the first house

bearing the inscription :—

"George Henry Robert Charles Vane, Viscount Seaham, laid the foundation stone of the first house of Seaham Town, November 28, 1828 AD. John Dobson, Esq., architect.

This house was the Londonderry Arms, South Crescent, a hostelry still in existence. Some months ago Mr Malcolm Dillon, agent to Lord Londonderry, Mr Luke Dillon, and others, went into the basement and inspected the stone, which was afterwards removed by permission of Messrs Nimmo, brewers, of Castle Eden, the owners of the house. It was found to consist of two large blocks, clamped together with a cavity between. One stone had been fractured and the cavity exposed, but there was no brass plate.

On these facts being made public the brass plate was recovered in a remarkable manner. It was forwarded to Mr Dillon by a gentleman at Wingate, and it appeared that it had been found on a scrapheap. The explanation would seem to be that the house was rebuilt some years ago and that the plate had dropped out of the cavity and had been inadvertently scrapped. The stone and plate now repose in the grounds of the Londonderry Offices, Seaham Harbour.

The work of making the harbour was advanced with great rapidity and simultaneously the railway to Rainton was laid, and on August 25th, 1831, the first cargo of coal was shipped, from the North Dock in the brig Lord Seaham, which put to sea amid the firing of cannon and the cheering of about 5,000 spectators. Previous to this, however, ships had sailed with cargoes of lime, while timber imports had commenced. During the year 1831, 411 vessels of various sizes sailed from the harbour laden with lime or coal. The South Dock was opened in 1835. A railway from South Hetton was completed in 1833, and coal commenced to come to the new harbour from that district and has been coming ever since, the South Hetton Coal Company being large shipper's to-day.

Haswell, Murton, North Hetton and other pits began to send their output, and the sinking later, of Seaham Colliery, by Lord Londonderry, added greatly to the volume of trade.

The population 13 years after the foundation stone laying ceremony, was 2,036; in 1861, it was 6,137; in 1901, 10,136; in 1911, 15,757; in 1921, 16,957; and in 1928, it is estimated by the Registrar General to be 19,350, while the number of inhabited houses is 3,161. In the adjoining parish of Seaham, which includes Seaham Colliery, there is an estimated population of 7,000, and 1,500 inhabited houses. The combined population of Seaham Harbour and Seaham Colliery is thus more than 26,000. There is a movement on foot for the amalgamation of the two parishes, and a further suggestion for their incorporation as a municipal borough, but these projects are held up for the present pending the report of the Royal Commission on Local Government.



*Charles William Vane
Marquess of Londonderry*

The third Marquess of Londonderry died in London on March 6th, 1854. His last important public act in connection with his industrial enterprises was the cutting of the first sod of the Londonderry Railway between Seaham and Sunderland, on Feb. 8th, 1853. The line was opened for mineral traffic on Aug. 3rd, 1854, and for passengers on July 2nd, 1855. The Marchioness Frances Anne died at Seaham Hall on January 20th 1865.

The sinking of Dawdon Colliery, which was commenced by the late Lord Londonderry in 1899, had added greatly to the trade of the port, as this pit can raise 4,000 tons of coal per day. At the end of 1923 the present Marquess began the winning of a new colliery known as Londonderry colliery, on the north side of Seaham Harbour. The sinking is now completed, and it is hoped to draw coal shortly. It is confidently predicted that the production, when the pit is fully developed, will be one million tons per annum.

In recent years at the harbour a large new dock and piers have been constructed. The new dock was opened in 1905 and was extended quite recently, and the coal shipping staiths have been greatly augmented. The shipments of coal in 1927 were more than two million tons. The docks are now conducted by the Seaham Harbour Dock Company, of which Lord Londonderry is chairman of directors and the largest shareholder.

SOME INTERESTING ITEMS.

In a historical record of the commencement of Seaham Harbour, written by the late Mr George Boggon, a one-time proprietor of the now defunct "Seaham Observer," there are some interesting items concerning the early days of the harbour and town.

Mr Boggon who died in 1904, obtained much of his information from old standards who were present at the foundation ceremony, including his own father.

After describing the foundation-stone laying, it is recorded that after Lord Londonderry had laid the stone of the North Pier, the crowd moved gradually northward, notice having been given that all persons were required to retire beyond a certain barrier prior to firing a mine, which was to blow into the air a large mass of rock, to commemorate the events of the day.

SPECTATORS INJURED. Sufficient time was given for the purpose, and a signal gun was fired two minutes before the springing of the mine that all might be upon their guard, and look to their own safety.

The explosion took place, the rock was shattered to pieces, and parts of it were hurled into the air and scattered for some distance around.

Three persons who had not attended to the caution were injured by the fall of the fragments, one man having a shoulder dislocated, and another an arm broken, while a boy received a severe contusion.

Another accident reported was that to one of the workmen engaged at the harbour. He fell over the cliffs on the night of the ceremony and lay until the following morning, his injuries being such that he died soon afterwards at his home at Pit House Lane, near Leamside.

The railway carriage known as the "Wellington Car," in which Lord Londonderry's party descended to the site of the docks, was an open conveyance, the body being mounted on four colliery wagon wheels.

BUILT FOR "IRON DUKE."



The Marquess of Londonderry K. G.

It was constructed at the wagon works of Lord Londonderry at Chilton Moor for the conveyance of the Duke of Wellington while the "Iron Duke" was on a visit to the Londonderry collieries in 1827. It was often used in subsequent years by Lord and Lady Londonderry when inspecting the progress of the harbour and town

Mr John Buddle, described as the valued friend and agent to the third Marquess, who was prominently connected with the commencement of the port, was the eminent mining engineer of Wallsend

The band which attended the function, was composed of workmen from the Rainton Collieries. The instruments were nearly all clarinettes, and there was a big drum, but very few brass instruments.

The only access for visitors in carriages from the Sunderland direction to the site of the harbour was by way of Seaham Hall and the beach, to the mouth of Dawdon Dene, across the burn, and up a bank on to the high level near the site where Sebastopol Terrace was afterwards erected.

STONE FROM PENSRAW.

The block of sandstone which formed the foundation-stone of the North Pier was brought from Penshaw Quarry on a lorry drawn by horses. Much of the stone used in the construction of the harbour came from Penshaw in this way. The quarry was at that time the property of Lord Londonderry. When the harbour had so far advanced as to admit small craft, keels were loaded with stone at Penshaw Staithes and brought down the Wear and thence to Seaham by sea.

The North Dock, in its early days was fitted with a falling gate, hinged at the bottom, which at high tide was lowered under water. When the gate had to be closed, it was hauled up again



The Marchioness of Londonderry D. B. E.

Royalty has at various times visited Seaham as the guests of the Londonderry family, as long ago as 1842 the Duke of Cambridge visited this town as the guest of the third Lord Londonderry, on the occasion of the birthday festivities of Lord Seaham, afterwards fifth Marquis of Londonderry. His Royal Highness was conducted over the docks and harbour works, and the visit created much stir in the neighbourhood. In the year 1859 the Duc d'Aumale, one of the Orleanist Princes of France, visited Seaham Harbour, and in 1862 the Comte de Paris and the Duc de Chartres, members of the same Royal house, visited the town, accompanied by Prince Michael Gortchakoff and other distinguished personages.

On this occasion a parade of volunteers took place, and the Volunteer Drill Hall (Vane Hall), which had just been completed, was inspected.

On January 15th, 1868, the town was gaily decorated, and there was considerable rejoicing, on the occasion of the visit of the Duke of Teck and the late Duchess of Teck who were accompanied by many other notabilities. Two years later the town was visited by Prince and Princess Christian. The Duke of Edinburgh, in his capacity of Inspector of Coastguard, paid an official visit to Seaham on November 17th, 1880, and on the 1st of February, 1884, his Royal Highness the late Duke of Albany visited the town, and was received at the railway station by a guard of honour

composed of men of the 2nd D.A. Volunteers. The visit of their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales on November 1st, 1890, was an historic event in the annals of the town. More recently, 1896, the Duke of Cambridge visited Seaham Harbour as a guest of Lord Londonderry and inspected his lordship's fine regiment—the 2nd Durham—and also the "Londonderry" Schools Battalion. In 1898 his Royal Highness was again a visitor at Seaham Hall, and was present with the Marchioness of Londonderry at the inspection of the 2nd Durham (Seaham) Volunteer Artillery.

A Voice from the far past.

BY THE REV. CHARLES GREEN. (First Curate of Seaham Harbour).

It may seem strange that one of such an abnormal age as mine should care, even if able, to write this letter. I am, however, but obeying what seems an almost irresistible impulse to express the deep interest with which I have been reading the published records of the Centenary celebration the good people of Seaham Harbour have been keeping.

It is true that I write from a far distant home in the south and have had all my clerical and other attachments in the south for very many years; but I was born a Durham boy in 1830, which was only two years later than when the first sod was cut for that wonderful enterprise which has more than fulfilled all the expectations it may have created, nor is it at all away from my subject if I refer to my curacy days and the duties I had to discharge as domestic chaplain at the Hall under its then mistress, Frances Anne, Marchioness of Londonderry, quite the most outstanding of the whole Londonderry succession.

With more than one of them I was brought into touch, more especially with the fifth Marquis whom we knew as Lord Vane, and whom I always found particularly gracious, so much so indeed that in after days when I had become Vicar of a Church in Sunderland he invited me over to Wynyard for a Sunday when I made the acquaintance of his charming lady, the daughter of Sir John Edwards, and had also the opportunity of taking notice of the future sixth Marquis, to become so widely known as Chairman of the London School Board. He was then but a boy, and the pleasant picture I have of him is standing by his mother's side at the piano while she played and he took his part in singing Moody and Sankey's well-known hymn, "Dare to be a Daniel."

But without any question, in connection with the Centenary celebration, the leading figure in our thoughts should be that great lady, Frances Anne, widow of the distinguished Marquis, whose far-seeing enterprise called the harbour into existence.

If any adequate and veracious account of her be asked for, I may surely claim to be the only competent survivor of that day to give an authentic reply, for I had every opportunity of forming a judgment. Day after day at intervals, for the space of three years, I was brought into personal contact with her Ladyship at Seaham Hall, and have no hesitation in describing the Marchioness as a very imposing personage, truly good at heart, and with genuine religious susceptibilities, but very decidedly high and mighty in dealing with whom you had to mind your Ps and Qs.

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