

**WINSTON CHURCHILL AND THE SECRET IRISH
WINDFALL
THAT PAID FOR CHARTWELL**



Frances Anne Vane, Marchioness of Londonderry,
great-grandmother to Winston Churchill.
Portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence, 1818.

In 1921, Winston Churchill inherited a financial windfall from a most unexpected source. The property and money came to him indirectly from Frances Anne Vane, Marchioness of Londonderry, (January 17, 1800 – January 20, 1865), who was the mother of Frances, 7th Duchess of Marlborough, and therefore Winston's great-grandmother.

Frances Anne was born in Lord Lichfield's house, St. James's Square, London, the only child of Anne Catherine MacDonnell, 2nd Countess of Antrim, Ireland (February 11, 1778-June 30, 1834) and Sir Henry Vane-Tempest 2nd Baronet

(January 1, 1771-August 1, 1813). Frances Anne wrote of a miserable childhood, saying she was badly treated, her parents never got on, and she was constantly in the charge of a governess. She said her own dreadful experience was ‘to make me determined never to strike or terrify a child.’^[1]

In 1819, Frances Anne married (as his second wife) Charles William Stewart, 1st Baron Stewart, (May 18, 1778-March 6, 1854), who was obliged by a demand of her father to change his surname to hers. Charles was over 20 years her senior and was most probably a father figure to the 19-year-old, but theirs was a happy marriage. She made up for the loneliness of having been an only child by bearing six children, three boys and three girls, as well as taking on the deceased first wife’s son as her stepson. In 1822, she became a marchioness when her husband succeeded his half-brother Lord Castlereagh to become the 3rd Marquess of Londonderry. Frances Anne at her father's death, when she was aged just 13 years, inherited extensive lands in northeast England, along with Durham Coalfields, which meant she had an income from coal mining.^[2]

Frances Anne’s husband died, March 6, 1854, and as she was an out-going woman for the time in the Victorian era, she became even more-so after Charles’ death. Although employing a full complement of staff, she saw to matters of the estate herself. A photograph shows her, 1859, laying the foundation stone of the blast furnaces near Seaham colliery.

When her mother died in 1834, Frances Anne had also inherited extensive property from her estate, located in the province of Ulster, along the County Antrim coast between Glenarm and Cushendall, that included the village of Carnlough and Garron Point.

Ireland was struck by a great famine during the years 1845-9, when due to heavy rains the potato crop suffered blight and was destroyed. Thousands died of hunger and thousands more emigrated to the United States of America. Frances Anne built a castle named Garron Tower, (referred to as the mansion house) north of Carnlough, as a summer residence for herself. The name Garron in Irish and Scottish means a small horse or pony.



Garron Tower castle as it was in Frances Anne's time.

The construction of the castle took place during the years of the famine, providing jobs for local people, and Frances Anne laid the foundation stone in February 1848. Garron Tower was described as 'a castellated mansion built after the style of the 15th century.' A contemporary newspaper description held that it:

'formed two sides of a quadrangle, with a high octagonal tower, the east side fronting on an overhanging cliff with a sheer drop of nearly 300 feet to the sea. The grand hall and staircase were decorated with the old arms and flags, including the colours of the 18th and 25th Light Dragoons and the 10th Hussars, all three of which regiments Frances Anne's late

husband had commanded. ... along the cliff-top was an embattled rampart over half a mile long, with embrasures and bastions mounted with cannon.'



Garron Tower, Carnlough, County Antrim today.

Queen Victoria visited Belfast in August 1849, and legend has it that in her honour, Frances Anne fired the cannons herself the blast effect shattering the castle windows.

Five acres of formal gardens were planted, that included a rose garden, fishpond, and glass houses in which to grow exotic fruits. Walks and drives were developed, and Frances Anne promoted a local flower show. There is a Tasmanian blue gum eucalyptus tree in the garden which is today one of only two of its kind that are the oldest in the British Isles. Having been built at a cost of £4,000 the castle was ready for occupation in 1850. Local people worked as paid domestics in the castle and gardens, and local fishermen and farmers sold their goods and services to the castle.

A twenty-one-gun salute fired from the canons in the grounds, heralded the start of a grand house-warming party, and the entrance of such notables as George William Frederick Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. Frances Anne stayed at Garron Tower every year during the summer months and into the autumn, during which time she entertained plenty of visitors, including Benjamin Disraeli and his beautiful wife Mary Anne, who were great friends of hers. One year Prince Philippe of Orléans, the Comte de Paris, came with a large party. Distinguished Ulstermen included Sir Hugh Cairns the Lord High Chancellor, and Sir James Hogg, who was a director of the East India Company.

Each year, Frances Anne gave a tenants' dinner for about 300 people at the town hall, Carnlough, that included clergymen representing all the faiths. There she would lecture her workers on the merits of good farming practices: the rotation of crops; the cultivation of turnips and flax; the necessity of drainage.

Towards the end of each year, Frances Anne would sail to England, where she spent Christmas at Wynyard Park the family seat of the Vane-Tempest-Stewarts. It is a vast mansion, and in her time, there were 7,000 acres attached to it. In October 1903, the house would become famed as the location where King Edward VII held a meeting of the Privy Council and the documents connected with the Council were headed 'At the Court at Wynyard'.

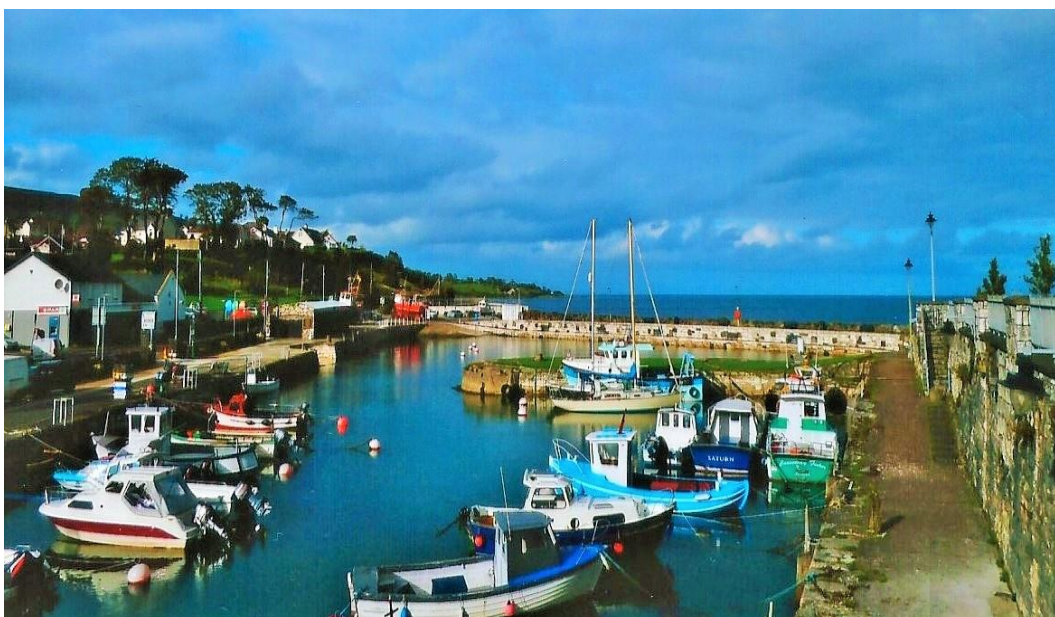


View over Carnlough with Garron Point, jutting out over the sea.
Photo courtesy of Mrs Joan Thompson.

Frances Anne died at Seaham Hall, County Durham. The house was one of the many properties acquired by her husband through his marriage to her, and she was considered to be one of the greatest heiresses of the time. At approximately 11 o'clock on the night of January 20, 1865, three days after her 65th birthday, Frances Anne passed away. Her eldest son Lord Vane and his wife, and her daughters, Lady Portarlington and Lady Adelaide Law, were by her bedside. Frances Anne's ancient ancestry on her mother's side were the McDonnells of County Antrim. They 'claimed descent from Robert II the first Stewart King of Scotland' (2 March 1316 – 19 April 1390), who reigned as King of Scotland from 1371 to his death in 1390, and was the first monarch of the House of Stewart. 'Robert's daughter, Princess Margaret Stewart, married John, Lord of the Isles, a member of the Clann Donihnaill [Clan MacDonald]. Around the end of the 14th century their son, John Mor MacDonnell, crossed from Scotland to Ulster, where he married Margery Bysset, of the Antrim Glynnnes.'^[3]

There is a legend in Ireland that for certain families when their time comes, something appertaining to a poltergeist appears to claim them. Lady Portarlington and Lady Law afterwards said that as their mother was dying, they

heard ‘the phantom coach’ drive up to the front door, and then, as she ceased to breathe, drive away ‘doubtless taking her spirit with it.’ [4] A story was told by an old domestic servant whose mother had worked at Seaham Hall at the time of Frances Anne’s death: ‘Suddenly there was a fearful noise and commotion in the house, and everyone rushed into the main hall. Everyone ran from all directions, some rushing down the stairs. Some thought the house was on fire. Suddenly, above the other sounds, a piercing wail was heard, loud and prolonged. It was at this moment that Frances Anne breathed her last.’ It was believed that ‘true to the tradition of the McDonnells of Antrim, it was the cry of the banshee’ - that is a female spirit in Irish folklore - who heralds the death of a family member, usually by wailing, shrieking, or keening, and which ‘occurs at the death of a chief of the MacDonnell family, that they had all heard.’ [5] It appears these happenings were believed to have occurred because ‘Frances Anne was the direct descendant of the last Countess.’ She was given a fine funeral, her ‘remains were escorted to the family vault at Long Newton by the 2nd Durham Artillery Volunteer Corps, which had been raised in Seaham, and were commanded by her eldest son.’ [6]



Carnlough small harbour, Co. Antrim as it is today, photo courtesy of Mrs Joan Thompson.

Frances Anne in her will, dated July 6, 1864, left her estate to her eldest child, George Henry Robert Charles William Vane-Tempest, 5th Marquess of Londonderry (1821-1884). At his death it passed to his third child, Lord Herbert Lionel Henry Vane-Tempest. Garron Tower castle was not much used after Frances Anne's death, and Lord Herbert sold it along with the grounds in 1915, for £8,144. 9s, to McNeill's Hotel, Larne, who ran it as a hotel.

Lord Herbert suffered an untimely death at which time the next in line for the estate was the second son of Frances Anne's daughter, Lady Frances Vane, who was married to John Churchill 7th Duke of Marlborough and was the mother of Lord Randolph Spencer-Churchill. But he had died in 1895, which meant that the next in line to inherit was his elder son Winston Churchill.



Lord Henry Vane Tempest

Lord Herbert Vane-Tempest's death had come about, January 25, 1921, when he was a passenger on a Cambrian Railways Express train *The Flyer*, travelling in Wales from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury. As a director of the Cambrian Railway Company he would have been a first-class passenger in the front carriage, and the train crashed into a local train. Due to a mix up in relation to the tracks, two trains travelling in opposite directions were positioned wrongly on the same stretch of track, and collided at Abermule, between Welshpool and Newton. The driver of the express saw what was coming and jumped clear but was seriously injured. The 'engine of the express mounted the engine of the local train' travelling from Welshpool to Abermule 'and crashed down on the roof of the first coach'.^[7] Seventeen passengers, including 58-year-old Lord Henry, the driver and fireman of the local train, were killed.



Train wreck at Abermule in which Lord Henry Vane Tempest was killed January 25, 1921.

Lord Henry Vane Tempest had gained the rank of Major and Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel in the Durham Artillery Volunteers. He had not lived in

Ireland but in a mansion *Plas Machynlleth*, at Machynllet, Montgomeryshire, Wales.

Winston Churchill's inheritance

Winston Churchill's inheritance was Carnlough Lime Works and quarries that had been established years earlier by Lord Londonderry, the railway, the harbour, messuages, i.e. bathing lodges, and tenements, whose occupants paid rent, all of which were located in County Antrim. Initially, Winston thought the income from the estate would be £4,000 a year, but he then discovered the entire estate was worth much less than earlier estimates, amounting in total to £56,000 after death duties, and the income was £2,000 a year. In addition, Winston inherited an enormous pile of dining room silver from Garron Tower castle that was delivered to the Churchills' home, No.2 Sussex Square, London. It was valued by Garrard & Co., London, at £1,700, on which Winston had to pay Probate charges. But later, November 24, 1922, Sharman D. Neill Ltd, Belfast, valued it at £1,444. The collection included an antique pierced potato ring, valued at £200, that rather intrigued Winston, and six dozen silver meat dishes.

The money from the Garron Tower estate was a god send to Winston, who was ever cash-strapped, living on overdrafts, and his wife Clementine frequently lamented that the bills were not being paid. Clementine rejoiced about the windfall, they had holidays, and helped out financially members of the family, but oddly, none of them uttered a word of remorse for the horrific death of the man whose estate had provided the money.

Winston buys Chartwell Manor

The Churchills were both eager for a country home and as their daughter Mary wrote ‘his inheritance from his Vane-Tempest cousin 1921, brought the dream within the realm of possibility.’^[8] Chartwell Manor (original name of the house) that belonged to Captain Archibald John Campbell-Colquhoun who, having inherited the estate on the recent death of his brother William, June 15, 1922, did not want the place and had never lived there, and put it on the market for sale directly. Churchill’s purchase offer of £5,000 was accepted, September 24 that year. The Irish windfall aided Winston to buy the property the name being later changed to Chartwell House. There were 13 domestic staff running the house, and 70 acres of farmland attached to it with twenty men employed, and a lake called the Chart Well that was fed by a spring, and extensive gardens. Writing to Clementine the following year, September 1923, Winston told her in relation to the property in Ireland, ‘The estate at this moment is at least as large as it was when I succeeded, but part of it is invested in Chartwell instead of in shares.’^[9]



Londonderry Arms Hotel today, photo courtesy of Mrs Joan Thompson.

Winston also inherited the Londonderry Arms Hotel, Carnlough, built 1847-8, that was originally a coaching inn. He is reputed to have visited the hotel in 1926, during the time he was in Belfast giving a speech to the Belfast Chamber of Commerce. He had spoken as an honoured guest in the Ulster Hall and praised a speech his father had made there in 1886. As a guest at Queens University during rag week the students presented him, March 3, with a green hat and clay pipe.



Londonderry Arms Hotel, Carnlough, with a print of Sir Winston Churchill's portrait above the mantelpiece.

Initially, Winston is reputed to have planned to turn the establishment into a summer residence for himself and his wife Clementine, but he changed his mind. He was advised via the agent, May 25, 1922, that he should 'consider whether in view of the present disturbed conditions of the immediate neighbourhood, he would be well advised ... to part with the control of the principal hotel in the town.' [10] Their advice was taken and in 1923, Winston sold the hotel for £975 to Mary Anne Rafferty, who was a tenant of the hotel,

and who held the Lease for the property for a term of 21 years due to expire 1933, and who was presumably managing the hotel.

The hotel was sold again in 1947 and bought by Frank O'Neill and his wife Moira. Today, a print from an original portrait of Winston hangs above the mantelpiece in the aptly named Churchill Suite. The original portrait of Winston had been commissioned during the Second World War by Clementine in 1943, and was painted by the Hungarian artist, Professor Arthur Pan. Clementine had several prints made that were signed by Winston, and which she sold to raise funds for the war effort in Russia. Frank O'Neill junior saw a print at an auction in London and, recognising it for what it was, bought it and brought it home to the Londonderry Arms Hotel. The original oil painting hangs in the American Embassy in London. The hotel has been owned by the O'Neill family for 70 years.

Winston came into the inheritance of the Irish property at a particularly dangerous time in Irish-British politics. A guerrilla war of Independence had been waged from 1919-1921, during which hundreds of people had been killed. In May 1921, Ireland was partitioned under British law by the Government of Ireland Act, which created Northern Ireland. A truce was agreed, July 11 of that year, but in June 1922, disagreement among republicans over the Anglo-Irish Treaty led to an eleven-month Irish Civil War. An Irish Free State was created, December 6, 1922. Garron Tower castle was burnt maliciously during that year, and although it never belonged to Winston, it was undoubtedly torched due to the name of Londonderry having been attached to it. The castle was closed as a hotel in 1939. Having been later refurbished the castle still stands today and is a school, located in a beautiful setting, enjoying spectacular

views across the Garron Point headland that has white, perpendicular cliffs, jutting out into the sea.

In 1929, Winston had been on tour in the US, and on November 5, Clementine met him at the railway station to welcome him home. He astonished her by telling her immediately, that he had ‘lost a small fortune’ in the Great Crash of the American stock market, which had taken place during the last week of October.[11]

By November 1931, the income from the Garron Tower estate had dropped to £900 a year, which was still a substantial sum for the again cash-strapped Winston who, as his daughter Sarah put it existed ‘from pen to mouth’ meaning he was dependent upon income from press articles and book sales. The Carnlough workers’ cottages were now reduced to slums, and rather than take on the cost of repairs for rent, Winston arranged that December for the tenants to buy them at a cost of one guinea each. The Second World War broke out in 1939 and by 1940, Winston was Prime Minister. From that time and particularly after the end of the war, his financial fortunes would increase from his published books and writings, and for the first time in his life, he would become a rich man. He sold the remainder of the Garron Tower estate, the lime works and the harbour at Carnlough, in 1948 for £8,000 to the Earl of Antrim.[12]

Sources:

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Notes:

[1] Edith Marchioness of Londonderry: Frances Anne the life and times of the Marchioness of Londonderry and her husband Charles Third Marquess of Londonderry; pub. 1958, Macmillan & Co Ltd, New York, St. Martin's Press; Ch.1, p.14. [2] Ibid. In his last will and testament, Frances Anne's father had stipulated that she must retain the surname Vane, and whoever married her would have to adopt her surname in lieu of his own. [3] Ibid. Ch.1, p.11; [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid. Ch.9, pps.209-300. [6] Ibid. Ch.9, pps.290-300. Biographer Edith Londonderry quoted from Frances Anne's substantial correspondence held at Wynyard Park, Co. Durham, and Mount Stewart House, Newtownards, Co. Down, N. Ireland.

[7] Richard Hough, WINSTON & CLEMENTINE The Triumphs & Tragedies of the Churchills, pub. Bantam Books, January 1991; Ch. 25, p344, quoting from a report in *The Times*.

[8] Mary Soames, CLEMENTINE CHURCHILL, pub. Doubleday a division of Transworld, 2002, Ch.15, Chartwell, p.246.

[9] David Lough, No More Champagne Churchill and His Money, pub. Head Zeus, Ltd., 2015; Ch. 24, p.351; ref. correspondence between Nichol Mansty and Winston Churchill, 25th 26th August and 1st September 1948, quoting from L1bank statements, Churchill College, Cambridge.

[10] CHAR 1/160: Letter, May 25, 1922, from Lumley & Lumley to Churchill's secretary, Eddy Marsh, in correspondence with MacDonald & Wall the agents for the Londonderry Arms Hotel, County Antrim, Ireland.

[11] Mary Soames, CLEMENTINE CHURCHILL, pub. Doubleday a division of Transworld Publishers Ltd., 2002; Ch. 14, The Twenties, p.244.

[12] Edited by their daughter Mary Soames, SPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES The Personal Letters of Winston and Clementine Churchill, pub. Doubleday a division of Transworld Publishers Ltd., 1998, Ch XII p.273.