

Speaker: Linda Bankier

With over three decades of experience as an archivist, Linda Bankier had researched details of Ford Estate for which records during the Marquis of Waterford ownership are scarce. Linda stated that archival work is an ongoing process, often with new facts coming to light at later dates; it must be like being a detective!

Linda laid the foundations of the Waterford family's possession with an ancestral family tree starting with a William Carr in 1606; later came Sir John Hussey Delaval, who used Ford Castle as his summer retreat from Seaton Delaval Hall. Working through the genealogy, it was Susanna Delaval who married the 2nd Marquis of Waterford and through whom Ford Estate was inherited by the Waterford family. Their son, Henry, 3rd Marquis of Waterford, married Louisa (nee Stuart, of Highcliffe Castle, Dorset) in June 1842 and he brought his wife for her first visit to Ford in September 1842. Articles appeared in the Berwick Advertiser, relating how the couple were welcomed on their visits by the Estate tenants, with fond farewell processions as the couple left for their home, Curraghmore, in Ireland. The noble couple were much in love but sadly the Marquis died from a riding accident in 1859. He had stated that Ford Estate be left to his widow, Louisa, Lady Waterford, for her lifetime, when it would revert to the Irish Waterford heritage.

When widowed, Louisa, Lady Waterford decided to make her home at Ford Castle, but it required refurbishment which she initiated by remodelling the castle in the mediaeval style that we see today. She was an artist of repute and a socialite, thus able to entertain many guests and dignitaries there.

Lady Waterford was a compassionate, benevolent individual, having great concern and care for her tenants. We heard much of the social history of the time – how the cottages were almost uninhabitable, their floors being below ground level, therefore damp and with inadequate ventilation. With her philanthropic outlook, in addition to providing gifts and material support to her poor tenants (food parcels, clothing, blankets), in 1898 Lady Waterford set about redeveloping the village, improving upon the previously neglected and disreputable cottages. She built a new school, which she adorned with her art, thus improving education for children. And she also provided a nurse, whose residence was Jubilee Cottage. There was to be no pub in the village, since Lady Waterford belonged to the Temperance Society.

The Estate comprised many tenant farms and, before mechanisation, they required a host of workers. Our speaker illustrated the workers' itinerant life-style with images of farm labourers '*flitting*' – usually an annual occurrence in May following the '*hirings*'. A census return showed the birth places of one family's 11 children – mostly in different localities within the wider area as the father moved employment.

Associated Ford Estate industries included milling, where Heatherslaw Mill, then known as Ford Mills, was modified to house the water-wheel within its main building. The hamlet we now know as Heatherslaw was then known as Ford Forge and supported the Black family's smithy, famed for spade making – they had a further outlet at Spittal. There was no bridge, two distinct communities existed, one either side of the river, one supported by the mill and the other by the smithy. Coal Mining at Ford Moss supported a small community of workers, evidenced now by cottage remains and clumps of rhubarb; the mine eventually closed owing to water ingress.

Crookham village, part of the Estate bordering Pallinsburn Estate, supported the only non-Anglican, Presbyterian church in the area. Lady Waterford initiated provision of fresh water to the village, to reduce infectious diseases.

Our speaker painted a fascinating sociological picture of life in the 19th century Ford Estate and of the improvements made during the Waterford family ownership, all clearly explained and well illustrated, with far more detail than can be reported here. The talk was followed by a History Society outing to visit Lady Waterford Hall.

Rosemary Bell