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Helens Terrace

OUR SHARED HISTORY PROJECT

Saturday 29th July 2023.

Victorian architecture at its finest is manifested in this charming row of 3 storey terrace houses, faced with Newry granite and complimented by red bricks. This terrace of 7 houses each had a generous garden to the front and these would have been used as allotments by many residents to help feed their families.

Many would also have kept poultry and the little community would have been well sustained amidst a spirit of camaraderie.

The houses first appear in the Valuation Revision Book of 1887 and are valued at £9 each !!! The terrace is adjacent to Pig Hall Loanan which today connects Slieve Gullion Road with the arterial Camlough Road and was a residential outpost in the late 19th century, surrounded by rolling green pastures and overlooked by the formidable Newry Union Workhouse. This grim institution opened its doors on 16th December 1841. Occupying a 7 acre site, it was built at a cost of £8827 with a capacity for 1000 inmates.

The terrace was built by Robert Dempster, an industrialist, who arrived in Newry from Forfar in Scotland in 1855, aged 38.



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Compiled by James Mc Arevey.

WHO WAS ROBERT DEMPSTER?

Robert was born in Forfar back in 1816 and his parents were John Dempster and Margaret (CHALMERS) DEMPSTER.

He married Helen Halliwell and they had 10 children, unfortunately 3 of these died in infancy. He began his working life as a millwright in Brechin before moving to Lille in France. His time there was very well spent and he adopted great technical expertise of flax spinning and towing.

He continued his travels and returned to Castlemellan in Co Down to take charge of a machine shop there. Itchy feet brought him back to Blairgowrie in Scotland where he briefly managed a mill. His next move was to Bessbrook and a link to John Grubb Richardson who owned the world famous mills.

That same year he formed a partnership in a tow spinning concern with George Lucas whose family owned SOHO FOUNDRY which was situated beside the towing plant.

George Lucas later died and now Dempster was in full control. He now had an opportunity to score real success with the withdrawal of cotton from the world market due to the American civil war and the ability to export linen globally.

Dempster's next foray was to build a corn mill in Cornmarket and this concern was opened in 1865. Robert Dempster was held in very high esteem across the district, employing over 500 people.



Sadly Dempster died at his home in Abbey Yard in 1890 and the Mill Manager, Robert Kerr, took over. Following the death of MR Kerr the Mill struggled on until 1927 when it closed.

Robert Dempster and his family, all Presbyterian, are buried in St Patrick's, Church Of Ireland, Newry.

Following WW2, Stark Bros, a textile manufacturer from Manchester, took over the property, relocating to Greenbank Industrial Estate in 1978.

The next owners were Haldanes who operated their timber and hardware business from there. Eventually, Haldanes moved to a new green field site at Carnbane, amalgamating with their main competitors giving us the brand we have today.....Haldane Fisher

The building was then bought by the Confederation of Community Groups in 1994 and today is the modern Ballybot House.

THE TERRACE.

An advertisement in the "Newry Telegraph" on 24th July 1866 gave notice of the public auction of 6 acres of land at Knockmorris, commonly known as Pig-Hall, on Thursday 26th July.

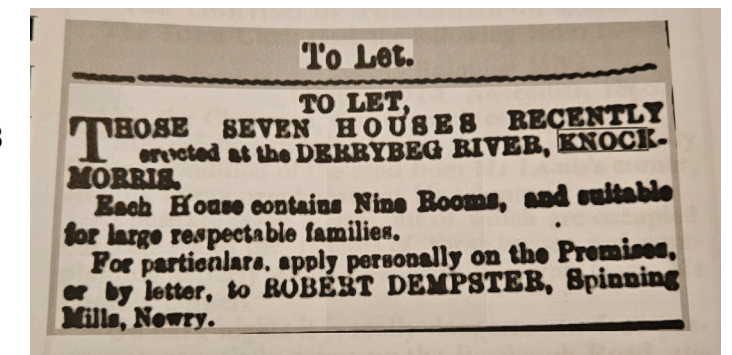
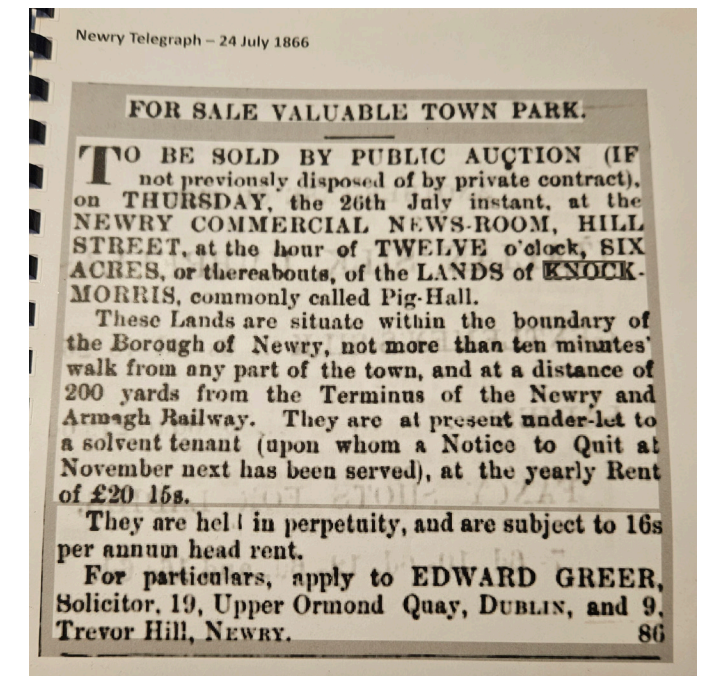
In the following edition on 28th July 1866 the paper carries a report of the public auction.

"A park, the property of John Gordon Esq, situate in the townland of Knockmorris was put up for sale by public auction on Thursday by Mr Joseph Loughran.

Mr Robert Dempster, being the highest bidder, was declared the purchaser for the sum of £570, being at the rate of £108 12s".

It would appear that the Terrace was built in late 1885/ early 1886 as they are advertised for rent in the "Newry Reporter" on the 4th May 1886 and described as **"Suitable for large respectable families"**.

For a short period the houses were known as Knockmorris Terrace and then became "Helens Place". The widely held opinion is that Mr Dempster named the houses after his wife, Helen. This name prevailed right through until 1934 when they were listed for sale by public auction on 29th November that year. Thereafter, they became known as "Helens Terrace"



References to Pig-Hall can be traced back to circa 1850 but there is no definitive information as to the origin of the name.

Today, "Helens Terrace" is a resplendent gem from our industrial past.

The terrace is symbolic of a vibrant hub of industry created by a plethora of visionary businessmen supported by a thriving Port and Canal, sadly all long consigned to history.