

## **‘THE MEMBER FOR LISBURN – FRENCH, NOT ENGLISH’**

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Many towns in Ireland have a clear historical identification with one dominant landlord family, today usually embodied in street names more than in any other personal or proprietorial link. Belfast has the Chichesters and the allied Donegall name. Bangor has the Wards, Newtownards the Stewart/Londonderry/Castlereagh family, Ballymena the Adairs, Lurgan the Brownlows, and so on.

Lisburn's historic connection has been with the Hertford dynasty of the Seymour-Conway family of the overwhelmingly dominant landlords until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is still, in the town, a Seymour Street and a Conway Street, and there was, and may still be, a pub called the Hertford Arms, but the name most associated with Lisburn is not Hertford, or Seymour or Conway, but Wallace. There is Wallace Park, the town's park, also home of the once invariably triumphant Lisburn Cricket Club; there is Wallace Avenue, and there is Wallace High School. There is the Wallace memorial in Castle Gardens, and there are also at least two remaining Wallace drinking fountains.

The Wallace in question is not a dynasty or even a family, but one individual, Sir Richard Wallace, who never lived in Lisburn, who visited it probably not more than seven or eight times, and whose connection with it was, in a sense, accidental, and lasted for less than two decades. But for one of those decades he was the Member for Lisburn in the House of Commons at Westminster, and for both of them he was, as the inheritor of the Hertford estates, the owner of much of the town and most of the surrounding countryside.

Having myself been born and reared in Lisburn, having played cricket in Wallace Park, gone to church in Wallace Avenue, and attended Wallace High School, I have long had a passing interest in Sir Richard Wallace, and on my first ever visit to London in 1950, duly paid the first of several visits to the Wallace Collection in Hertford House.

The original purpose of this paper was not to talk about the Wallace Collection or to present a potted life of Wallace, though there is, as far as I can ascertain, no published biography of Wallace. Rather it was to explore his career as a parliamentarian, as a member of the House of Commons during a period of extraordinary parliamentary evolution, and when the House boasted many of the great parliamentarians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

When Wallace took his seat in 1873, Gladstone was Prime Minister, and Wallace, as a Tory, was in opposition. From 1874 to 1880 his friend Disraeli headed a Conservative administration, and for his final years, up to 1885, Gladstone was again in power. Wallace was there for a key period of the great Disraeli-Gladstone confrontation. Those two were not the only Parliamentary giants around at the time. John Bright, hero of earlier radical days, was still there, and remained after Wallace's departure. Joseph Chamberlain arrived in 1876. Sir Charles Dilke was the coming man of the Liberal Party. Arthur Balfour and Lord Randolph Churchill entered the House just one year after Wallace.

The eruption of Irish affairs as the predominant issue in the House coincided with Wallace's tenure as the representative of an Irish constituency. Under Isaac Butt the Home Rule League was founded in 1874 and became the Irish Parliamentary Party. From 1874 on, Joseph Biggar, like Wallace, sat for an Ulster constituency. Parnell arrived in 1875.

The major drama of Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule for Ireland and the resulting upheaval in British politics occurred mainly after Wallace's departure from the House, but Home Rule was already dominating Irish politics before he arrived in 1873, and the question of land tenure in Ireland had become a major parliamentary issue. Gladstone's first Land Act, the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act of 1870, had set in motion the long process of Irish land reform. This was carried further by Gladstone's Second Land Act of 1881, which, among other things, set up the Land Commission and opened the way to land purchase.

Outside Parliament, the Land League was founded in 1879, and the land war is generally deemed to have started in that year, resulting in a widespread anti-landlord campaign including rent strikes, boycotts and violence. As one of the largest and certainly one of the richest Irish landowners, these were matters close to Wallace's purse and heart. So what part did he play at Parliamentary level, and more widely as an MP, in these great matters?

Before we try to answer that, we should look at the man himself. Who was Richard Wallace? When the Fourth Marquis of Hertford, Richard Seymour-Conway, died at his Paris

home, the *Bagatelle* in the Bois de Boulogne in August 1870, he was one of the richest members of the British aristocracy. Earlier in the century it was estimated that the Hertfords were among the four richest families in the United Kingdom, and enormously well connected in both England and France.



*The Bagatelle as it is today*

But the Marquis died almost alone; apart from servants, the only people attending him in the mini-chateau were an elderly female friend and Richard Wallace, who had been for some years acting as his secretary, agent and companion. Wallace, though born in London, had lived all his life in France, was French-speaking, 52 years of age and unmarried, though the father of a 30 year-old son (now serving in the French army at war with Prussia). He had been brought up since the age of six by the Hertfords in Paris, mainly by the Fourth Marquis's mother, and had no means of his own other than an allowance from the Marquis and a small income bequeathed to him by Henry Seymour, late brother of the Marquis.

Often referred to in family circles as 'the dear nephew' it was generally assumed in the higher ranks of society that he was, in fact, the illegitimate son of the Fourth Marquis, though this was not acknowledged publicly, nor it would seem, privately.

Wallace was one of the very few mourners at the funeral of the Fourth Marquis on August 27, 1870, as it made its way to the family vault at *Père-Lachaise*, through a barricaded Paris already at war with Prussia. Another mourner was Francis George Hugh Seymour, second cousin to the deceased, and heir to the Hertford title, and to all un-entailed property. But the bulk of the vast wealth, including the Irish estates, was, under the known will of the Fourth Marquis, to go to another cousin, Sir George Hamilton Seymour.

But when the will was opened at *Bagatelle*, it was found that the Marquis had, twenty years earlier, added a codicil to it, leaving everything un-entailed ó *Bagatelle* itself, other property in Paris, Hertford House and other property in London, and the treasures in them, and the Irish estates - to Richard Wallace. He did this, the codicil said, 'to reward as much as I can Richard Wallace for all his care and attention to my dear Mother, and likewise for his devotedness to me during a long and painful illness I had in Paris in 1840 and on all other occasions' There was no mention of any relationship to Wallace.

Overnight Wallace found his income had soared, and his position transformed from a dependant retainer given to gambling and speculating, getting into debt, and carousing with his bohemian artist friends, to a multi-millionaire philanthropist. Less than a week after the funeral, Napoleon 111 surrendered at Sedan and the Prussian army advanced rapidly on Paris, putting it under siege; it was, perhaps, the three month siege of Paris as much as the Hertford legacy that transformed Wallace.

By the end of the siege, or at least by the end of the Commune fighting that followed it, Wallace had become a public hero in two countries: knighted by Queen Victoria, he was awarded the *Legion d'Honneur* by France, and was proposed for membership of the new French National Assembly. (He was in fact, ineligible, having been born outside France.) He was lauded in France, and particularly so among the beleaguered English community in Paris ó about 4,000 strong - for his charitable work during the siege. He had also become a married man, for during the siege he had married Julie Amelie Charlotte Castlenau his long-time mistress, and mother of his illegitimate son.

On the death of the Fourth Marquis, Wallace had immediate access to the liquid assets in Parisian banks, assigned to him under the codicil, and he promptly donated £12,000 to equip a field hospital for the army unit in which his son was serving. He gave £4000 to launch a fund for the victims of the shelling of Paris, and he became chairman and chief organiser of the British Charitable Fund set up to distribute relief. Within a few months it was estimated Wallace had donated £30,000 to various efforts to relieve starvation and distress.



One of the last hot air balloons launched from the beleaguered city was named *Richard Wallace* in his honour. Destined for Bordeaux, it unfortunately was blown further out into the Atlantic and its pilot was lost. The name was more permanently preserved in the *Boulevard Richard Wallace*, along the northern end of the *Bois de Boulogne*.

He had also, with admirable efficiency, managed to protect the great Hertford collection of art ó paintings and other valuables ó by transferring them all ó many from the *Bagatelle* which became a front line of defence - to the Hertford property in *Rue Lafitte*, laying heavy wooden beams over them, and piling earth on the roof to protect the house from shelling.

The upheaval of the war and the siege greatly destabilised Parisian life and saw the end of the elite society of the Second Empire. Wealthy families left the city, selling, among other things, their art and valuables. When Napoleon 111ø Superintendent des Beaux Arts , the *Comte de Nieuwerkerke*, put his collection up for sale, Wallace bought the lot. But by then Wallace had, it would seem, already made up his mind to move part, if not all, of his own great collection out of Paris and to the safety of London. The Hertford residence in Manchester Square ó still called Manchester House but now to become Hertford House ó already housed many family treasures and could hold many more.

At around the same time he must have made the more difficult decision to leave France and settle in England. Now a baronet with much property in England and the still prime source of his income, the Antrim estates, in the United Kingdom, and with France in turmoil, he and Lady Wallace moved to London in early 1872, living first in the Hertford property in Piccadilly while Hertford House was adapted for the enlarged collection. He still retained his property in Paris, including the *Bagatelle* which needed restoration after its use by troops defending Paris during the siege.

But he had much more pressing business in the UK: Sir Hamilton Seymour, the main beneficiary under the Fourth Marquisø original will, had immediately challenged the codicil and claimed the inheritance, drawing the income from the Antrim estates. Wallace had written to the tenants, from Paris, during the siege, instructing them not to pay rent to Sir Hamilton. He then applied to the courts by way of an action for trespass, seeking to recover one particular farm at Glenavy from Sir Hamilton. While the Hertfords had been far from popular in Lisburn, the initial assumption in the town was that Wallace was some sort of *parvenu* fortune hunter who had duped the elderly and ailing Marquis and cheated the rightful heir.

Wallaceø case against Sir Hamilton was heard first at the County Antrim Assizes in the Crumlin Road Courthouse in Belfast in July 1871, with Isaac Butt appearing for Wallace. The judge directed the jury to find against Wallace. He lodged an appeal. This was heard in December, in the Court of Common Pleas in Dublin. Wallace lost again, and appealed to the Court of Exchequer Chamber. In February four of the seven judges in that Court found for Wallace. Sir Hamilton then headed for the House of Lords ó but having been advised privately against this ó he accepted what was an extremely generous settlement from Wallace. In return for renouncing all claim on the Irish estates he was given £400,000, plus a small portion of the estates in County Down near Lisburn.

The court hearing in Belfast in 1871 was, almost certainly, Wallace's first visit to Ireland. The case attracted enormous public attention, particularly Wallace's appearance in the witness box. There he told his life story, how his mother, Mrs Agnes Jackson, had brought him from London to Paris at the age of six, and how he had lived there since, with the Hertfords – mostly with Mie Mie, the wife of the Third Marquis, and with Lord Henry Seymour, her younger son, and later with the Fourth Marquis. He had been trained in no profession, but had been provided with all his needs, and with an annual allowance. Lord Hertford, he said, had twice made very substantial payments to settle debts incurred by him. He made no reference to any relationship to the Hertfords.

His conduct in the witness box, coupled with his new status as hero of the siege of Paris and bountiful philanthropist, did wonders for his image in Lisburn. He was no longer seen as an unprincipled adventurer, but as a celebrity, and one who might make a better landlord than the Hertfords had ever done. His victory in the Dublin court was celebrated in Lisburn.

What Wallace did not tell the Court in Belfast, and in fact never publicly acknowledged, was that he was the illegitimate son of the Fourth Marquis. His mother, a married lady of Scots birth, was Mrs Agnes Jackson. She had had an alliance with Richard Seymour-Conway the future Fourth Marquis, then a 17 year old, and ten years her junior, in Brighton in 1817.

Mrs Jackson was a Wallace from Ayrshire, and while she may have been no better than she ought in Brighton, she is believed to have come from a noted Scottish family, and was the daughter of Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie. It was that family's coat of arms and motto that Sir Richard took as his own when he was made a baronet. It is now the badge of Wallace High School

Mrs Jackson, as far as we know, reared young Richard in London until he was six years of age, when she took him to Paris and deposited him with his father, who by then had become Lord Yarmouth, and heir to the Hertford title and millions. There he lived, as Richard Jackson, with his grandmother, the wife of the Third Marquis, and with her son, Lord Henry Seymour, and to a lesser extent, with his father, who maintained his own residence. In 1842 Richard Jackson changed his name to Richard Wallace, by having himself so baptised in the Anglican church in Paris.

It must have been one of the most bizarre upbringings any child could have had. The Hertfords were enormously rich and well connected, and dissolute. They were English

aristocrats who drew their income from Ireland and lived in France. The French connection began with the Peace of Amiens in 1802, when the then young Lord Yarmouth ó who was yet to become the Third Marquis ó joined the throng of English visitors who rushed to take advantage of the first chance to visit Paris in more than a decade, and to see the great and terrible Napoleon in the flesh.

A further reason for going was the insistence of his new wife, whom he had married secretly in 1798. She was Maria Fagnani,(Mie-Mie) daughter of the Marchesa Fagnani and the outcome of a dalliance with the Marquis of Queensbury. A daughter was born, and a son Richard ó later the Fourth Marquis ó arrived in 1800. Mie-Mie had no great love of England, nor indeed of Lord Yarmouth, but she did have a large share of the Queensbury fortune.

The young couple did not meet Napoleon, but they saw almost everyone else. They particularly enjoyed Tallyrand's musical evenings. Too much, perhaps, for Mie-Mie was still in Paris when the peace ended and war was resumed, and hostile aliens in France found themselves arrested and interned ó Mie-Mie in Paris with her infant son and daughter, and Lord Yarmouth, who was arrested at Calais when coming over to bring back his family - in Verdun. Mie-Mie soon began an affair with the Governor of Paris and found her detention quite agreeable.

Yarmouth was marginally less comfortable in Verdun, where he was soon able to acquire a mistress and pursue his interest in, and purchase of, works of art. Also a prisoner at Verdun was Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie, and he and Yarmouth became, if not friends, then close acquaintances. In 1805 Mie-Mie, without assistance from Yarmouth, produced a son, who was named Lord Henry Seymour (not Seymour-Conway), and in the same year Tallyrand negotiated a six month parole for Yarmouth to enable him to leave Verdun and begin discreet diplomatic contacts with the regime in Paris with a view to ending the war. In 1806 Yarmouth was released under an exchange of prisoners. Mie-Mie stayed in Paris, and, apart from a short exile to Boulogne caused by the 1848 revolution, did so for the rest of her life. She died in 1856, having lived apart from her husband for more than 50 years.

Yarmouth, who had been a Member of the House of Commons since 1798, was sent back to Paris in 1806 as an emissary for London in talks which failed, and then returned to England where he became a close confidante and fellow roisterer of the Prince Regent. That took him to Brighton, and it seems that it was there in 1814 that he met up again with his fellow-prisoner Sir Thomas Wallace. Sir Thomas was living in Brighton with a daughter

from one of his several marriages, Agnes. She was already married, and was Mrs Agnes Jackson, but Mr Jackson was out of the picture.

Yarmouth was already an avid collector, and he spent much of the war buying paintings, speculating, gambling and generally misbehaving. He is regarded as the Great Collector of the Wallace Collection. He returned to Paris after the war, and resumed contact with his son and heir, Richard, now 16 years old, bringing him back to live part-time with him in England. Less than two years later, in 1817, young Richard met Mrs Jackson in Brighton, a meeting that resulted in yet another Richard. On his father's death in 1822 Yarmouth became the Third Marquis, and apart from being enormously wealthy was also important politically, not least because he effectively owned eight seats in the Commons ó one of which, Lisburn, had been occupied by his son Richard since 1819. His close associates in the Tory party included Wellington and Peel.

The Third Marquis achieved fame of a sort by being the model for Lord Monmouth in Disraeli's *Conningsby*, and for the Marquis of Steyne in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.

He died in 1842, and his son Richard succeeded to the title as the Fourth Marquis. By that time he had effectively settled in France. Having spent 14 years of his boyhood in Paris, where his mother, his half-brother and his unacknowledged son were still living, he had plenty of ties to that country. In 1835 he purchased *Bagatelle*, the small chateau in the Bois de Boulogne that had been built in 1777 for the future Charles X. A year later he moved into a house in *Rue Lafitte*, off the *Boulevard des Italiens*, and until his death in 1870 lived in one or other of those two residences, apart from a two-year exile to London at the time of the 1848 revolution. He did not marry, nor did he live with his mother or half brother, Lord Henry Seymour, who still shared accommodation with 'the dear nephew' or 'Monsieur Richard' as Wallace was known in the family. It was not until after Mie-Mie's death in 1856 that the Fourth Marquis brought Wallace to live part-time with him. Three years after that, in 1859, Lord Henry Seymour died, and Wallace became the Marquis's companion, as well as his secretary and agent for buying art, which he had already been for many years.

Much influenced by his friend and uncle, Henry Seymour, notorious high-liver and founder of modern French horse-racing, Wallace had become a gambler ó on the stock exchange rather than the race course - and a pursuer of mistresses. He had many friends among the bohemian artists of the Latin Quarter, and had also started collecting art on his own account. In the 1840s the Fourth Marquis had had to pay off large debts on his behalf,

and obliged Wallace to sell his own growing art collection to raise money. (He later bought back some of these items.)

He had travelled Europe, as far as St Petersburg, to attend auctions and buy paintings, he had met personally or in his father's company many of the great figures of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, from Tallyrand onwards. The Emperor Napoleon III had been a frequent visitor to the *Bagatelle*. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had taken tea there. Flaubert, Baudelaire, Prosper Merimee, Meissonnier had all been acquaintances.

So his migration to London in 1872 meant real change; his only prolonged experience of London had been two years there in exile from Paris during and after the 1848 revolution. His parting gift to Paris was the presentation of 60 or more cast-iron ornamental drinking fountains, still known as *Les Wallaces*, and still to be found in odd quarters of the city. There is one outside Hertford House in London, and another two in Lisburn. Others have migrated to different parts of Paris, and even overseas.

The fountains were, in fact, a practical gesture to the poor of Paris after the disruption of the city's water supply during the siege. Water became very scarce, and expensive. Wallace commissioned the sculptor Charles Auguste Lebourg to design the fountains, and he and the city shared the expense of erecting them around the city, where many of them remain to this day, still, I am assured, supplying drinking water. (The four caryatids in the fountains represent Kindness, Simplicity, Charity and Sobriety – qualities in which the Hertfords were notably deficient.) Wallace took to his new life as an English gentleman with some



enthusiasm. One of his first acts was to put his recently transferred Paris collection, plus items from Hertford House, on public display in the new Bethnal Green Museum. The exhibition was opened in June 1872 by the Prince of Wales, and remained open for three years, to be viewed by five million visitors. W E Forster told the House of Commons on August Fifth 1872 that the previous week 57,000 people had visited the Bethnal Green Museum, while only 17,000 had visited south Kensington. Something of a friendship developed between Wallace and the Prince of Wales, though it was a much more sedate business than that between Wallace's grandfather and the Prince Regent at the beginning of the century. It was the Prince of Wales who opened the Wallace Collection as a national museum in 1900.

Wallace also became an English country gentleman by buying, at a generous price, the Hertford country seat, Sudbourn Hall in Suffolk, from the Fifth Marquis who had inherited it along with the title, but without the income needed to maintain it. Wallace's public stature was increased further in 1873, when he was returned in a by-election as the Member for Lisburn, and entered the House of Commons. The seat had been occupied by both his father and his grandfather.

The Hertfords had not been the worst Irish landlords, but neither were they among the best. For many years they had been double absentees ó not just absent from Ireland, but from England as well. They had not been very generous, and had taken little interest in Lisburn since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Francis Seymour-Conway, the first Marquis under the revived title, had served as Irish Viceroy, in 1765/76, and had visited Lisburn several times and encouraged new building. The Third Marquis never once visited his Irish estates.

The Fourth Marquis visited Lisburn only once, in the late 1840s. He did so partly at the urgings of the Prime Minister Peel, in the aftermath of the famine. The Devon Commission of Inquiry had cited absentee landlordism as one of its causes, and Peel was aware that the Hertfords, closely identified with the Tory party, and among the biggest landlords in Ireland, were also among the worst absentees. The Marquis spent five weeks in Ireland, was warmly welcomed, and told the burghers of Lisburn that he would build himself a house in the town and spend his summers there.

Safely back in Paris he wrote to a friend telling her he had had a most prosperous Irish expedition, and believed he had done much good, especially to himself. McKnight, in *Ulster As It Is*, has a different account. He says the Marquis went to Lisburn, viewed the town from a high hill and declared that he liked it so well he would never return. And he never did, and he never built the house. At an election in 1852 the electors of Lisburn ignored a request from the Marquis to return a nominee of the Prime Minister, Lord Derby. Through his agent he informed his tenants that as they were unwilling to accord him any favours, they must expect none in return. When the railway line from Lisburn to Antrim was proposed ó running for miles through Hertford land ó the Fourth Marquis was lobbied for cash. His agent, Dean Stannus, travelled to Paris to press the matter, but was sent home empty-handed, the Marquis refusing even to see him.

In 1857 the offended Marquis bluntly told the electors of Lisburn they should elect the man that suited them best. In 1873, despite the Reform Act of 1867, the electors of Lisburn

decided the man that suited them best was their new landlord, Richard Wallace. The seat had been vacated by the sitting member, Edward Wingfield Verner, who was moving to his home Armagh constituency. Wallace had, perhaps, already shown some interest in entering politics by joining the Carlton Club in London, which also indicated his party preference. He may have been disappointed that the move to have him elected to the National Assembly in Paris had been ruled out.

The Hertfords had long been associated with the Tory party, and could have been one of the great political dynasties. Peel remarked of the Fourth Marquis that, had he lived in England and attended to his duties, he might well have risen to be Prime Minister.

Wallace was formally proposed and adopted as the Tory candidate for Lisburn at a meeting in the town on February 5th, 1873. He and Lady Wallace, accompanied by their son Captain Edmund Wallace, had arrived the previous day to a tumultuous welcome on their first visit to their estates. They had travelled by rail from Antrim, over the Dublin and Antrim Junction Railway, that same railway that had been recently built (opened in November 1871) despite the refusal of the Fourth Marquis, Wallace's father, to give a penny towards it.

Not having a house of his own to stay in in Lisburn, Wallace had leased Antrim Castle as his base. (This may have been a long-term arrangement, as more than a year later, when the British Association met in Belfast in August 1874, its members were Sir Richard's guests at Antrim Castle on a visit to that town., and in reports of the day it is described as his residence. He was not, in fact, there, and sent his apologies from Paris.)

When the train from Antrim reached Brookmount halt, on the Ballinderry Road a couple of miles from Lisburn, it halted and an address of welcome from the assembled Lisburn Town Commissioners was read and replied to. The party proceeded by horse and carriage towards Lisburn, but nearer the town it was stopped, and enthusiastic young men unyoked the horses and pulled the carriage to the Market Square. The Square was profusely decorated; there was a triumphal arch and an array of banners proclaiming *Cead Mille Failte, Wallace for Ever, Our Landlord and our Member*, and, presumably a reference both to his services at the siege of Paris and his duties as a landlord, *Strength to the weak and good to all*.

The *Newsletter* spelled out that message more explicitly when it wrote that Wallace was a high-minded gentleman, "the fame of whose princely benevolence is world wide, and there is not the slightest doubt but he will carry out his good nature as a landlord, dealing justly with all his tenants"

He and Lady Wallace, and their son, spent several days touring their estate. The dignitaries of Lisburn were invited back to Antrim Castle for lunch ó a private train was laid on, and the distinguished couple returned to Lisburn the next Sunday to attend morning worship at the Cathedral. It did not pass unnoticed that Sir Richard and Lady Wallace each dropped a gold sovereign into the collection plate.

Two weeks later Wallace took his seat in the House of Commons. At two subsequent elections, in 1874 and 1880, he was again returned unopposed. In 1884 he announced that he would not seek re-election, on grounds of failing health, and left the Commons on the dissolution prior to the 1885 election.

Now we come to the meat of this paper - Wallace's record as a Parliamentarian over those eleven years. Well, it should be the meat, but you may be relieved to hear that it need not detain us too long. In all Wallace spoke six times in eleven years, Twice to ask a question, once to make a short personal statement, and only once to contribute ó very briefly ó to a major debate. That was on the 1881 Land Act. Taken all together he would not occupy much more than one single page of Hansard.

He had been a Member for more than five years before he troubled the Hansard writers, and his short intervention on August 11, 1878, on the Second Reading of a Customs and Inland Revenue Bill, casts an interesting sidelight on the Member for Lisburn.

-Sir Richard Wallace rose to correct a statement made a few days ago by the Rt Hon the Member for Chelsea, who had said that the tobacco generally used in France and known by the name *caporal* was sold at 6d a lb, whereas the real price of it was six francs and 25 centimes ó five shillings in English money. The only tobacco sold at 6d a lb was of very inferior quality and was called *tabac de cantine* and was sold only at that price to soldiers and sailors on active service. Some honourable members had underrated the amount brought in by the Tobacco Tax in France in the year 1872. The amount received from that source had been £8 million and he had been informed that the amount had since been increased upon.ø

That could hardly be called a maiden speech, but he was almost certainly speaking with far greater authority on his subject than any other Member could approach. He waited another three years before rising again. This time it was to propose an amendment, at the committee stage, to the 1881 Land Act (then known as the Land Law (Ireland) Bill. He wanted the right which the Bill gave landlords to purchase a holding for the purpose of amalgamating it with a neighbouring one to be extended to tenants, so that a tenant wishing to buy a neighbouring farm could exercise the landlord's right. He said this custom of

consolidating holdings already existed on many estates in the North of Ireland, and was of great advantage to many smallholdings.

The government opposed the amendment on the grounds that consolidation was sufficiently provided for in the Bill, and that it was better that the landlord exercise his own right to purchase, than delegate it to anyone else. Under the existing system of free sale of tenancies the consolidation of holdings had increased much more in Ulster than in any other part of Ireland. Mr Biggar for the Irish Parliamentary Party also opposed the amendment saying nothing could be more mischievous.

In the end Sir Richard pressed the amendment to a vote, which was lost. Later in the debate he intervened again on the question of the landlord's power to resume (ownership of the tenancy) for the purpose of building labourers' cottages, and said he reminded the Government that there were other things absolutely necessary on an estate, such as schools, churches and hospitals. He hoped the Government would consider including powers of resumption for such purposes.

In July 1883 Sir Richard asked the Government if it proposed to take any action with respect to the drainage of Lough Neagh and the Lower Bann. In August 1884 he made a short personal statement on a question on fair rent settlements, put to the Irish Chief Secretary, which implied that he, Sir Richard, was insisting that tenants who settled out of court should pay court leet and other dues, so that in the end the new rent could be higher than the old. According to Hansard Sir Richard was understood to say that the new rent could never be higher than the old, that the additional amounts were so trivial his agent would never apply them.

His final contribution, and from a Lisburn point of view, his finest, came right at the end, in May 1885, on the Redistribution Bill which abolished the constituency of Lisburn by merging it in a new area to be called South Antrim. Sir Richard proposed that the name of Lisburn should be substituted in the Bill as the designation of the South Antrim division. Lisburn was an ancient borough and the most important town in the county. It was the cradle of the cambric and damask linen trades in the North of Ireland. It had for centuries returned Members to Parliament, and in his opinion, and in that of the inhabitants of the division, it was entitled to give its name to the Southern Division of the County of Antrim, and not be consigned to political oblivion.

Once again Mr Biggar differed with Sir Richard; Lisburn, he said, had always been a nomination borough, and the electors had always been either very slavish or very corrupt.

Ballymena was a much more important place. Sir Richard's amendment was lost, and he, like Lisburn, went off into political oblivion.

Words spoken in the House are the most obvious measure of a Member's contribution, but not the only one. On his first visit back to Lisburn as a sitting MP, in September 1873, Sir Richard addressed a public meeting and went through the business of the House over the intervening period in some detail. Seven years later, at the adoption meeting for the 1880 poll, in the Assembly Rooms in Lisburn in March of that year, he discussed Lord Beaconsfield's foreign policy, followed by another recital of the business of the House. Looking back since the election in 1874, he said he had devoted his entire time to his parliamentary duties during those six years.

-You might consider me rather silent while in Parliament, but really there were so many talkers there that I did not think it necessary for me to say much. I have, however, attended to my duties very closely, and there were few divisions that I have missed.

-Devoting his entire time was certainly overstating it. He had not abandoned Paris, and was soon back there in 1873 putting in train repair work to the *Bagatelle* which had been damaged during the siege. As we saw when the British Association visited Antrim in 1874, he was again abroad. In 1878 he was a Commissioner for the Paris Exhibition, which must have meant spending time in France. He was also working hard at being the country squire, hosting shooting parties at Sudbourn Hall in Sussex.

A quick survey of the Division Lists for the Commons during the period - the only record I know of a Member's actual presence in the House - tends to confirm what he said in Lisburn, for he was generally present, and invariably voting the Tory line. But divisions were not as common in the 1870s as they are now. He was on the Select Committee on the Ancient Monuments Bill in 1877, which suggests he was a reasonably active member.

He may have been a public hero after the siege of Paris, but in fact very little was known of him when he entered the House of Commons. It is perhaps significant that when *Vanity Fair* accorded him the accolade of a full-page, full-colour Spy caricature in November 1873, it described him as sitting as a Liberal. Indeed the Tory electors of Lisburn, when they approached him about being their candidate, first thought it prudent to ask whether or not he was a Conservative.

His agent Capron, replying to this query, told the Lisburn men their letter was the first intimation he had had that it was ever seriously thought that Sir Richard Wallace was not a Conservative in politics. Supposing that their doubt had arisen because he had been knighted

under Gladstone, he assured them that that was for special services in no way connected with politics. Sir Richard wrote himself to assure them that he was a thorough Conservative in politics.

His Conservatism seems to have been more that of a Disraeli than of an Ulster Tory grandee. In that 1873 speech reviewing his first months in parliament, he said nothing about Home Rule, though it was fast becoming the key issue, simply adding a concluding remark that he would prefer social to political legislation for Ireland.

By 1880 he had to be a bit more explicit; in his published address to the electors of Lisburn seeking re-nomination, he said he had given consistent support for a Ministry which had upheld the honour of the Empire, preserved peace and defended the constitution. He then went on to foreign policy and education in Ireland. Then he gave an assurance that he was an unflinching opponent of those who sought the disintegration of the United Kingdom, as he was persuaded that Home Rule would be most disastrous for the prosperity of Ireland. Finally he pledged his support for any well conceived measure for tenant rights.

He seems to have made little impression on the House. It may be that he was inhibited by his French accent. Sir Charles Dilke in his memoirs says he was a kind, cheery, polished gentleman. French, not English, speaking English imperfectly.

When he intervened to make a personal statement on the Land Bill in 1881, which I have mentioned, the Hansard record says "Sir Richard Wallace was understood to say" which suggests the Hansard writers had difficulty hearing him, and the original questioner, a Mr Gray, came back to remark that "the explanation of the Hon Baronet may have been satisfactory to himself, but I did not hear a word of it".

Dilke may have been a bit harsh on Wallace's command of English, for while others noted the French accent, and his very French appearance - another memoir recalls "his courtly address and charming French manners" - his command of English seems otherwise to have been perfect. Certainly his letters which I have seen are in good English.

He features little in the Parliamentary diaries of the period. Dilke has just that one reference to him. T P O'Connor, a contemporary in the House, recorded that

"He looked like a Frenchman to the end of his days. He was tall, well-proportioned, with a very regular featured face, a white moustache and the white Imperial (beard) *à la Louis Napoleon*. He dressed with scrupulous care, again rather like a Frenchman; He sat silent and observant and perhaps amused during the debates in the House. I was once engaged in trying to pass a Bill for the improvement of the condition of the agricultural

labourers in Ireland, and carried round a little manifesto to the Ministry by the Irish members of all parties. Wallace applied his name quite willingly, but with an amused almost enigmatical smile, and with some such words as -I suppose it will do good, as of a man who didn't think much in life did any good.

Galthorne Hardy, later Lord Cranbrook, in his diary for July 1<sup>st</sup> 1875 lists Wallace as among about 20 guests at a dinner given by Hardy for the visiting, Canadian Premier McKenzie. Two years later, in November 1877, the same diarist records a visit to Sudbourne, where he says Sir Richard received them most hospitably. -It is needless to say the dinner was too good, and required care and firmness. Lady Wallace speaks only French and I took her in, to my dismay, but stumbled through some very bad language. Our bag on the 13<sup>th</sup>, a very wet day, was 824 head. Yesterday 1000 pheasant fell and 645 other game.

Wallace was reportedly friendly with Disraeli, though no letters between them seem to have survived. In 1875 Wallace was among 20 MPs who came together to present a painting to Disraeli as a mark of our sincere admiration and respect. And in 1878, when Disraeli returned in triumph from the Congress of Berlin and became a Knight of the Garter, Wallace made the very generous personal gift to him of the Garter Star which had belonged to the Third Marquis. (Originally bequeathed to Peel in the Marquis's will, but then revoked.)

Almost all contemporary descriptions of Wallace say he was tall and handsome, very neat and always courteous, courtly and charming. The new *Oxford DNB*, for some reason, says he was a small, dapper figure, though this is not borne out by photographs of the time.



His Parliamentary standing, and his fabulous art collection, both helped Wallace establish himself as an English aristocrat. His name appears repeatedly in lists of appointments, and particularly in lists of donors to good causes. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Botanic Society, and appointed to the first Council of the new Royal College of Music; he was a patron of the Royal Albert Hall Amateur Orchestral Society, and of the Association for the Relief of Ladies in Distress through Non-Payment of Rent in Ireland. In 1871, even before his move to London, he presented a masterpiece, Ter Borch's *The Peace of Munster*, to the National Gallery, knowing full well that three years earlier he had, on behalf of the Fourth Marquis, outbid the gallery for

it when it came on the market. He became a Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery in 1879, and of the National Gallery in 1884, serving in both positions until his death.

Before either of those two appointments, he had been made, in 1878, a Member of the Board of Governors and Guardians of the National Gallery of Ireland, an honour he shared with the Duke of Leinster, then chairman, the Lord Talbot of Malahide, the Viscount Powerscourt and the Viscount Gough, among others. He was not present at the next meeting of the Board, in January 1879, and, as far as I can judge from the Board's minutes, he never attended any meeting, and may well never have visited the Gallery. He would have had opportunity for he travelled from London to the north of Ireland via Holyhead and Kingstown. But he did present a couple of paintings. The meeting of April 10<sup>th</sup> 1879 had before it a letter from him offering the Gallery the gift of what was described as Salvator Rosa's portrait of the painter Guercino.

Much better was to come, for at the next meeting another letter from Wallace informed the Board that he had long wished to become the purchaser of Daniel Maclise's picture *'The Marriage of Strongbow'* with a view of presenting it to the National Gallery of Ireland. This he did, and the massive painting is still something of a star attraction in the Gallery. The reason he gave for so wishing is intriguing. "I have always felt that this masterly painting of our great Irish artist ought to find a permanent home on Irish soil."

Note the phrase *our* great Irish artist, by using which Wallace identifies himself with Ireland, and that at a time when Home Rule nationalism was the dominant issue in Irish and British politics, and when he, as the Conservative and MP for Unionist Lisburn, was, in his own words, an unflinching opponent of Home Rule. Even more intriguing is the picture itself, for the *Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* is clearly meant to portray the destruction of Gaelic civilization by the incoming Norman-English, symbolised in the forced marriage. The painting is full of symbolism, and is still seen as a strong statement of nationalism. Wallace, as a very experienced expert on art, must have been fully aware of the painting's significance. In 1879 he added an Irish artefact to his collection – the seventh century Bell of St Mura, associated with the Abbey of Fahan.

One should not read too much into these things; there was a growing sense of Irishness throughout most sections of society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including among many who were not Home Rulers. (Witness the *Cead Mille Failte* banner in Lisburn to welcome Wallace in 1873.) But the presentation of the Maclise painting, along with his acceptance of

nomination to the Board of the National Gallery of Ireland, is perhaps another indication of how seriously Wallace was taking his new role as an English landlord, and an Irish landlord.

Unionism as an organised political movement within Ireland was only beginning towards the end of Wallace's Parliamentary career – particularly after the extension of the franchise in 1884 and Gladstone's espousal of Home Rule in 1886. He does not seem to have played any significant role in the creation of the Ulster Constitutional Club in 1882-83. He is notably absent from the photograph of Ulster Tory MPs and grandees taken at Sea Park, Carrickfergus on the occasion of the visit of Sir Stafford Northcote to open the new club premises in May Street.

By that time the Orange Order was becoming a potentially important player in conservative politics, though I have found no evidence of any link between the Member for Lisburn and the Order. At least I hadn't until I read an account in *The Times* of July 13th 1883 of the celebrations to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Aughrim.(sic) The largest assembly, it reported, was at Lambeg, near Lisburn, where the chair was taken by Lord Arthur Hill MP, Grand Master of Down.

—A telegram was received from Sir Richard Wallace, expressing regret that through a sudden illness he was prevented from attending the meeting, as he fully intended to do. It was received with cheers.

Sir Richard had very many sudden illnesses which proved useful excuses for non-attendance, so he may never have countenanced gracing the back of an Orange cart at the field in Lambeg. But the fact that his neighbouring landowner and MP, Lord Arthur Hill was not only there, but there in his capacity as Grand Master of Down, is an indication of just how difficult it would have been for Wallace to remain the Member for Lisburn after 1886.

It seems probable that he had, at one point, great hopes of passing the seat on to his son, Edmund, and perhaps even dreamed of founding his own dynasty to rival the Hertfords. When he and Lady Wallace moved to London from Paris they insisted Edmund came with them, though he was then 33 years of age, had a mistress and several children by her, had served as a Colonel in the French army, and was even more French than his father. He dutifully came, became a British citizen, and for several years was a permanent fixture, both in visits to Lisburn, and in shooting parties at Sudbourne. When, in the mid 70s, Sir Richard promised to build a house in Lisburn, he may have envisaged it a home for Edmund rather than an occasional residence for himself.

Wallace certainly made every effort to have his baronetcy made transferable to his son. Under the patent bestowing it, it applied to Sir Richard and to his heirs male of his body lawfully begotten, but as Edmund had been born before his parents married, he was ruled out. A change needed the approval of Queen Victoria, and Disraeli, as Prime Minister, tried to arrange it, but Victoria would have none of it. Allowing a baronetcy to pass to a bastard was not a precedent she was going to allow.

Despite that rebuff Wallace entertained hopes of a peerage, and there was public expectation that he would receive one. At the time of the 1880 election the *Newsletter* wrote an editorial on "The worthy baronet who is to attain before long a higher dignity." After praising him as "intensely Protestant and Conservative" but dispensing his munificence without distinction of creed or party, it added "all classes will be gratified when it may please the Crown to call him to the House of Lords."

I do not know what happened to those hopes at that time, except that they were not realised.

Edmund Wallace proved too French to settle in England, and he resisted his father's attempts to marry him off into the English upper classes. Eventually they quarrelled, and Edmund returned to France in the late 1870s and to his mistress. All contact was broken with Sir Richard, and they never met again.

The question of a peerage arose again in 1888. In May of that year, Lord Salisbury, then Prime Minister, noted in his diary that Hartington "Lord Hartington, future Duke of Devonshire and leading Liberal Unionist" had, on Alfred Rothschild's advice, put the art collector Sir Richard Wallace up for a peerage. Unfortunately Lady Wallace had borne Sir Richard a son in 1840 without the preliminary precaution of a wedding, which did not take place until 1871. Salisbury said he was perfectly content with ennobling Wallace, but he told Hartington that "the only trouble is the wife. Can one recommend a lady to be made a peeress who cannot be presented at court?"

The answer was presumably no, and Victoria's conscience was spared further exercise as regards Wallace. The Court Circulars of the 1870s and 1880s regularly list Sir Richard Wallace as among those present at levees and other functions held by Victoria or the Prince of Wales, but never accompanied by Lady Wallace. However her name does appear at non-royal functions, such as the Lord Mayor's Ball.

Lady Wallace has had a thoroughly bad press. She has been described as dowdy and unfriendly, she frequently absented herself from functions, even those hosted by Sir Richard,

on grounds of ill health, (as he did himself, often at very short notice) and she would not speak English (it is suggested she chose not to speak it, despite having good command of it.) But she was remarkably loyal to Wallace, even in his bohemian days when he had other mistresses, and she waited 30 years until he could marry her after the Fourth Marquis's death. Even after Wallace's death in 1890 she remained living in Hertford House, in the country she reputedly disliked, until her own death seven years later. And then she left the Collection to the British nation, not the French.

Declining health, and the breach with his son, seemed to have knocked the stuffing out of Wallace. A year after he left the House of Commons he returned to France alone and took up residence in the *Bagatelle*, leaving Lady Wallace in London. He came back once, for the opening of an exhibition at the Royal Academy, in 1888. He died alone at *Bagatelle* in July 1890, and was buried at *Père La Chaise* in the Hertford vault, at his own request under Lord Henry Seymour, his friend and fellow *bon viveur* in the Paris of his youth.

His will left everything to Lady Wallace. Since the death of his son in 1887 there had been much speculation about the fate of the Collection; some said he intended leaving it to the nation, others, noting that he retreated to France and was rarely seen in England, feared it might go to the French nation. The move in 1888 to secure Wallace a peerage may have been prompted by such misgivings.

News of his death in July plunged Lisburn into an orgy of grief; the following Sunday, churches - Methodist and Presbyterian as well as Church of Ireland - had pulpits and pews swathed in black, and in the Cathedral the Canon told the congregation that a great man, a Prince of Israel, had fallen. Wallace had given generously, on an annual basis, to all churches that lay within his estates, including, it seems, the Catholic churches. The Lisburn Working Men's Club passed a resolution expressing their sorrow at the loss of a great and good man, one of the best landlords who ever lived. The Town Commissioners immediately decided to name the park he had donated to the town after him. And the *Lisburn Standard*, in its obituary, did Sir Richard the honour of predating his marriage by 32 years, one year before the birth of his son.

He had been an excellent and generous landlord, and had already set in train the process of enabling his tenants to buy out their holdings. He had certainly been a change from the absentee and grumpy Hertfords, a great benefactor who, if he had never actually lived in the town, had been a regular visitor, and who had, finally, built a residence for himself in it. We know he paid two visits to Lisburn in 1873, and was back again in 1874 for

a lengthy period of electioneering. He was there again in 1875, and in 1876, when in October of that year he spoke at a meeting in the Ulster hall in support of the Government's Eastern policy.. I have found reports of subsequent visits in 1880, 1884, and 1885. On his later visits he and Lady Wallace did indeed stay in Castle House. The last of these may have



been in late May 1885, when he travelled from London to attend the meeting to nominate his successor as the Tory candidate in what was now South Antrim. But he was too ill to be present at the meeting, and Sir Richard and Lady Wallace seem to have spent the entire four days of the visit secluded in the privacy of Castle House, or The Castle, as Sir Richard described it in his note of apology to the meeting. Earlier that month he had been in Lisburn to welcome the Prince of Wales at the railway station as his train stopped briefly during the Royal visit to Ireland.

His contributions to the fabric of the town were remarkable. In addition to granting the land for the park, and paying for its railings, gates and gate lodges, he had built a splendid new courthouse, had paid for the refurbishment of the old market House, the Assembly Rooms, and had built, at a cost of £20,000, a new mansion in Castle Street, then High Street. He had also given the land for the Temperance Institute which was opened in the year of his death, and he had donated the site for, and paid for the building of, the new Lisburn Intermediate and University School, which became Wallace High School half a century after his death. He financed the reconstruction of the Union Bridge over the Lagan, and for good measure he also gave the town five Wallace fountains. He promoted, by means of favourable leases, the building of new dwelling houses in the town, including improved mill housing.

The elegant palladian courthouse was the most impressive reminder of his liberality, but was shamefully demolished in 1971. The Castle became variously known as Wallace House, and Castle House. Brett describes it as a large and imposing mansion, fairly plain, in the classical or Queen Anne style, and gives the architect as, probably, William McHenry, surveyor to the Wallace estate, and not, as is generally assumed, T B Ambler, who remodelled Hertford House for Wallace. The Lisburn mansion is much smaller than the London one, but has many similarities to it.

It would be nice to know how it was furnished and what works of art graced its walls. Brett, quoting his own grandfather, says the interior included fine fireplaces, tapestries, clocks and furnishings. At the time of Wallace's death in 1890, the contents of the house,

plus the adjoining estate office and agent's house, were valued at just over £10,000. One wonders if they included two fine paintings painted by a native of Lisburn, Mr Samuel McCloy, formerly a pupil of the Belfast Old School of Design, which, according to the *Newsletter*, Sir Richard had added to his collection on the occasion of his visit to the town in September 1873. He was so well pleased with them the report added, that he had commissioned the artist to paint another one, using some part of his estate as the subject.

The last act in the story came seven years after Wallace's death, when Lady Wallace died in London. The intense nation-wide interest in the contents of her will, and indeed the apprehension that, being French and reputedly no lover of England, she might leave the collection to France is captured in this extract from Lord Gower's diary, dated February 27<sup>th</sup> 1897 and written while on holiday in Corsica:

That morning as I was watching Dartmouth and Dr Trotter playing lawn tennis on the field near Napoleon's cave, the former shouted out the Hertford collection is left to the nation. Since hearing of Lady Wallace's death one had felt quite uneasy about the fate of that glorious collection in Manchester Square. To know that one's hopes had been realised was a real happiness. England will now possess by far the finest art collection that has been brought together in our time.

Meanwhile Lisburn had already erected its Wallace Memorial, in what is now Castle Gardens, to perpetuate the memory of one whose delight it was to do good, and in grateful recognition of his generous interest in the prosperity of this town.

**Sources:**

*Old Q's Daughter, The History of a Strange Family* by Bernard Falk, published in 1937 is a detailed and rather rambling account drawn from a host of sources. *The Greatest Collector; Lord Hertford and the Founding of the Wallace Collection*, by Donald Mallett, 1979, concentrates on the Fourth Marquis, but also contains much information on Wallace. The *Journal of the Lisburn Historical Society* [www.lisburn.com](http://www.lisburn.com) contains valuable material, mostly from the pen of J. F. Burns, a neighbour of mine in Causeway End Road in Lisburn many years ago. Fred Burns was for a time editor of the *Lisburn Standard*, then Editor of Hansard at Stormont and, I think, later worked with Hansard at Westminster. From what I have seen he was over many years an enthusiastic and persistent researcher into Wallace and the Hertfords. The only published material I have found by him is in the Society Journal.

Accounts of Wallace's initial reception in Lisburn, and other visits, are taken from the files of the *Lisburn Standard*.