

# JAMES EAST D

Address and  
Presentation to  
**James Wood Esq.**  
Member of Parliament for  
East Down, 1902-06  
from  
his Late Constituents,



# JAMES WOOD DOWN'S LIBERAL MP

'I thought you might be interested in this,' was the understatement from George Whyte of Crossgar, who had come across something of fascinating local interest at a Belfast auction.

Auctions provide much television entertainment, but they can also be a valuable source of local history, and this find was to shed new light on an episode in Irish history a hundred years ago.

**Berkley Farr** looks at the history behind the auction-house find.

Title page and page 2 of the *Address and Presentation to James Wood*

**T**HE OBJECT of our interest was a thick leather-bound book covered in embossed decoration and measuring twelve inches by fourteen inches in size. The title page, in richly-decorated lettering of gold, red and green, interwoven with flax flowers, read, 'Address and Presentation to James Wood, Esq., Member of Parliament for East Down, 1902–06 from His Late Constituents.' Another page contained a sepia photograph of a serious-looking James Wood in a high collar and cravat, surrounded by a decorated motif of shamrock, flax, roses and thistles.<sup>1</sup>

In Victorian and Edwardian times, illuminated addresses were a popular way of expressing esteem for a person, particularly as a form of recognition for public service. The one presented to James Wood contains the signatures of twenty-two prominent local people, who collected money to pay for the presentation. The address, in copperplate handwriting, is forthright in

its expression of praise of James Wood and the political stand he took.

It reads:

Dear Sir

After your contest at the late General Election to remain Liberal Representative of East Down in the Imperial Parliament, your supporters in that Division, and numerous friends elsewhere, are anxious to express to you in tangible form their admiration for the gentlemanly manner in which you conducted your part of the contests in the interests of Reform, Sobriety, Equal Rights and Goodwill among men – as against the successful calumny, intemperance, and organised violence of your opponents who have always sought to maintain their own private interests and class ascendancy under the cover of false and selfish Unionism, which has so long embittered and kept Irishmen apart.

Your election for East Down in 1902 virtually turned the

scale in favour of an extended Land Bill, which was passed the following year, and which with some compulsory amendments will settle for ever the tragic history of Landlordism in Ireland.

As a Tenants' Advocate in the Courts of Law, on the Public Platform, and in the High Court of Parliament, your practical knowledge, zeal and perseverance have been invaluable; so that we are proud to reckon you among the great Land Reformers of your country. For without efforts such as yours thousands of Tenants, who are now the happy owners of their farms, would have been ground to poverty under the old rack rents, or ejected from their holdings, and driven with their starving families into foreign lands like so many of their countrymen.

You have sympathised with every Reform for the emancipation of Labourers in town and country; and with the New Democratic Movement in Ulster for Independent thought and action among the sons of daily toil; and you have always aimed at the Co-Operation and Union of all creeds and classes for the improvement of their common country.

Your geniality, your buoyant temperament, and the unselfish devotion of yourself and your distinguished Partners to the interests of others have won you innumerable friends all over Ireland.

And with you we here associate Mrs Wood, who has borne her share in the turmoil of your elections; and now at this great Banquet given in your honour, while we beg to present to you this Bank Cheque, we also beg Mrs. Wood to accept this solid Silver Tea and Coffee Service which may remain, along with this Address and Illuminated Album, as a visible token and heirloom in your family.

And we pray that you may long be spared in health and

happiness to support, on the Platform and again in Parliament, the great principles of Reform, Temperance and Charity in all things.

Signed on behalf of the Subscribers

Gawn Orr M.D., Ballyleson Chairman

William Carse B.A., Magherahamlet Secretary

Belfast 28 September, 1906

The pages containing the signatures are decorated with charming watercolour miniatures by J. Carey of scenes from the constituency, including the Ballynahinch Mountains, Killinchy village, Dundonald, Dundrum Castle, the Giant's Ring and Scrabo.

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Inevitably the discovery of any historical item, such as the illuminated address, raises many questions. Who was James Wood? How did he become the Member of Parliament and what were the causes he espoused? Who were his supporters, particularly those who signed the address? What was his historical legacy and how did these events relate to the wider context of the Edwardian period?

In the middle of the nineteenth century the Liberals and Conservatives were the two dominant parties in Ireland, and a significant number of Irish Liberal MPs were returned to Westminster. The last general election with these two parties as the sole players was in 1868, when the Liberals won 65 of the 104 Irish seats. The subsequent rise of the Home Rule Party, however, decimated the Liberals, particularly in southern Ireland, and by 1874 only nine were returned. By 1880, the number of Liberals elected had increased to fourteen, but Gladstone's Reform Act of 1884 extended the franchise in the counties and at the election in the following year the newly-enfranchised

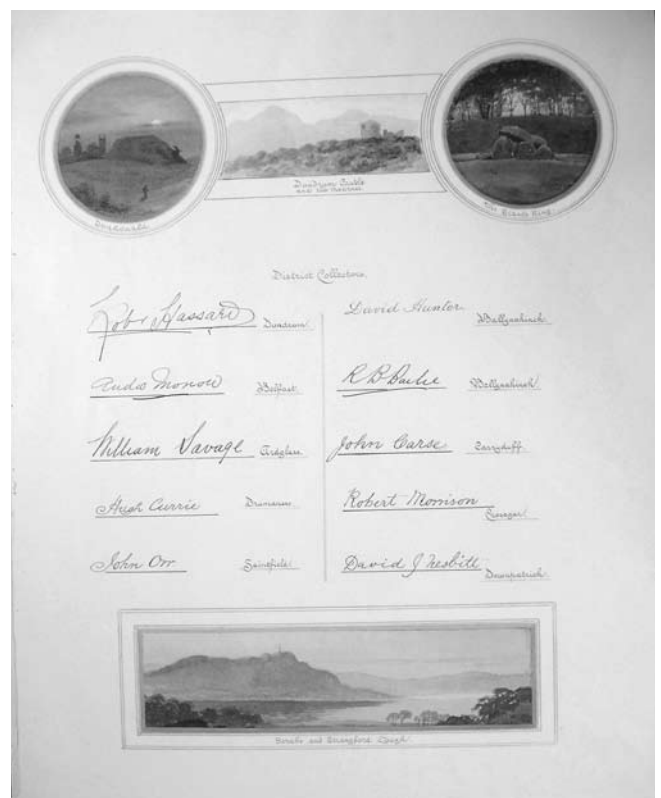
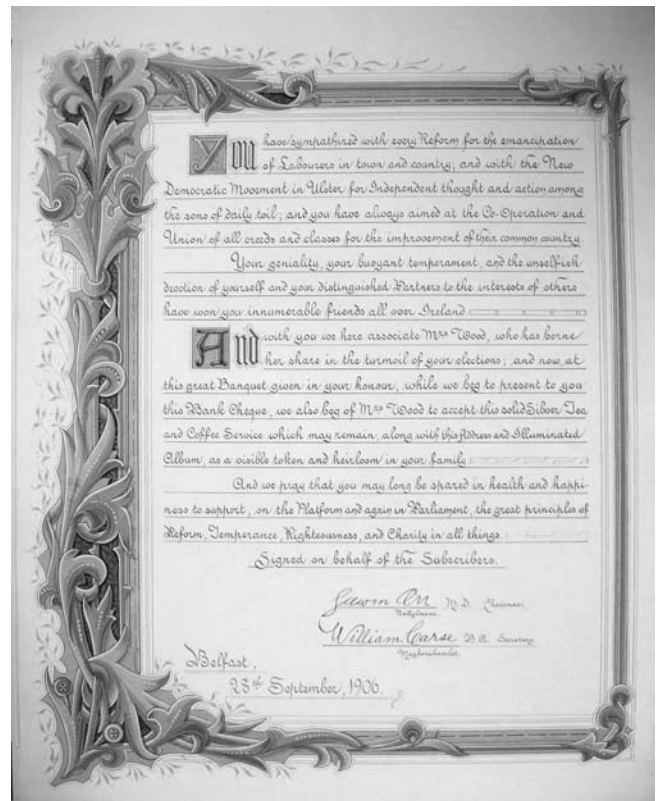
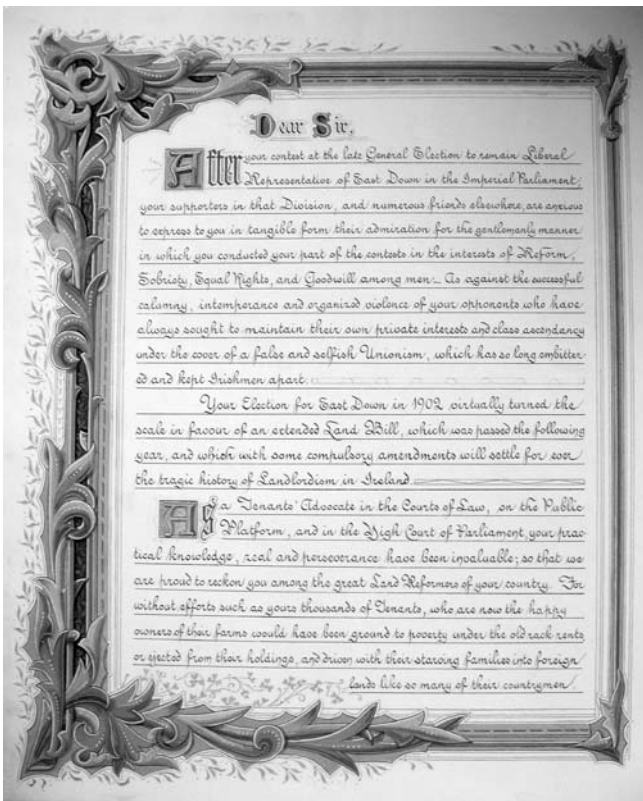
farm labourers tended to support Unionist or Nationalist parties and Liberal representation was wiped out. Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule further divided the weakened Ulster Liberals, with the majority becoming Liberal Unionists. It was 1895 before another Liberal was elected, and although representation remained until 1918, no more than three were returned at any general election.

I first heard of James Wood on 15 March 1962, while visiting James Barnes and his sister Jean on the night of the famous Orpington by-election. They came from a Liberal family in Greyabbey, and their dining room was dominated by an enormous portrait of Gladstone. As a boy, James recalled how his father took him to look across Strangford Lough to see the bonfires burning on the hilltops of Killinchy to celebrate the victory of James Wood in the 1902 by-election.

James Wood was born on 17 July 1867 in Co. Monaghan. He came from Clones to Belfast at an early age and began his education at Mountpottinger National School. He was an apprentice with the legal firm of Messrs H. and R. J. McMordie, Lombard Street, Belfast and qualified as a solicitor in 1893. He entered into partnership with John Moorehead who later became the first Chief Crown Solicitor of Northern Ireland.<sup>2</sup> He lived at Mount Salem, Dundonald, Belfast where he also farmed.

In his professional and political careers, James Wood played a prominent role in the struggle for tenant rights at the time of the fight against landlordism in Ireland. One of his earliest memories of that grim period was of his own parents being evicted from their holding in Co. Fermanagh because his father would not vote for a Tory candidate at an election.<sup>3</sup> Gladstone had begun the process of tackling the Land Question in his Land Acts of 1870 and

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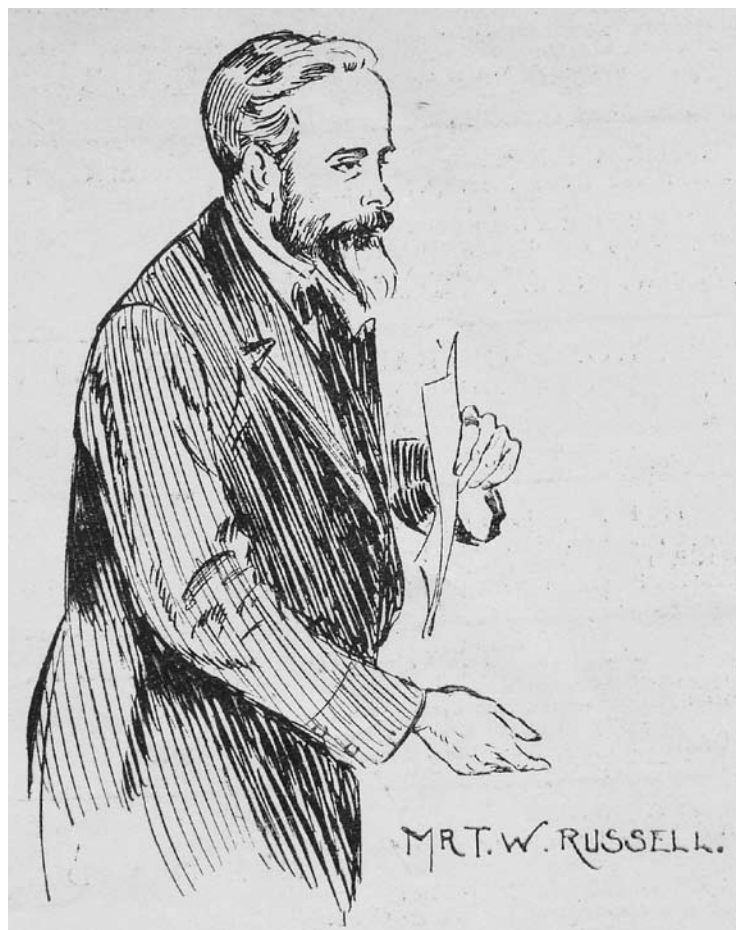


1881, but the conflict between landlords and tenants continued and resurfaced in 1894-95 with the tenants being led by T. W. Russell, the Liberal Unionist MP for South Tyrone. Despite a Conservative Act of 1896, landlords still refused to sell

and the demand for compulsory purchase of farms continued to grow. Russell began a new campaign, launching the Ulster Farmers and Labourers Union and Compulsory Purchase Association in the Ulster Hall, Belfast in June 1901.<sup>4</sup>

Pages 3-6 of the *Address and Presentation to James Wood*

In January 1902, J. A. Rentoul became a judge and resigned as the MP for East Down, causing a by-election. East Down was one of the four constituencies in the county between 1885 and 1918. It included Downpatrick and Ballynahinch and stretched from



T. W Russell, Liberal Unionist MP who broke with the party over land reform and finally joined the Liberals.

editorial strongly supported Col. Wallace and expressed concern that T. W. Russell was a friend of Redmond, the Nationalist leader.<sup>9</sup> Despite attempts by his opponents to introduce other issues such as Home Rule, the Boer War and a Catholic university, James Wood insisted that the election was about the single issue of a permanent and final settlement of the land question.

The Executive of the East Down Division of the United Irish League met in the John Street Hall, Downpatrick, and unanimously decided to support James Wood as a champion of compulsory purchase and resolved 'that all Nationalist electors should register their vote in his favour and poll against landlordism'.<sup>10</sup> Contrastingly, the Lecale District Loyal Orange Lodge No. 2 passed a resolution, 'That we, the Orangemen of Lecale, rejoice that an Orange candidate has solicited the suffrages of the electors of East Down, in the person of Brother Colonel R. H. Wallace'.<sup>11</sup>

The by-election took place on Wednesday, 5 February 1902, a mild, dry, day, and out of 8,136 electors, 7,035 recorded their votes (an 86 per cent poll), and there were only thirty spoiled papers. The count took place on Thursday morning in Downpatrick courthouse and shortly before 11 o'clock the result was announced:

Wood	3,576
Wallace	3,429

Although Wood's majority was 147, the detailed breakdown from the polling stations is of even more fascinating interest for the psephologist. The *Down Recorder* listed the approximate returns for each polling district and also included the number of Nationalists (i.e. Roman Catholics)—see Table 1.<sup>12</sup>

Wood succeeded in combining strong support from Nationalists with a remarkable following in Presbyterian areas, notably Drumbo, Saintfield and

Dundrum and Ardglass north to Killinchy, Saintfield, Drumbo and Lisburn. It was regarded as a safe Unionist seat, having only been contested in one of the six previous elections, when in 1886 the Unionist polled 5,093 against a Nationalist 2,561.<sup>5</sup> As most elections in the north of Ireland between Unionists and Nationalists are based on a religious head count, it was common, even as late as the 1960s, for seats to be unopposed where there was a clear religious majority for one side. While Nationalists could not win a constituency with a Protestant majority, a Liberal or a candidate with an appeal across the religious divide would have a greater chance of success.

The by-election created a great opportunity for Russell's compulsory purchase campaign, and James Wood offered himself as a candidate following the unanimous vote of support at a meeting of representatives in Saintfield. The Unionists picked Colonel R. H. Wallace of the

Fifth Royal Irish Rifles, who was serving in South Africa. The contest was to be between a Presbyterian solicitor with practical experience of supporting tenants, and a local landlord from Myra Castle.

Major J. N. Blackwood-Price DL, the High Sheriff of Down, received the nominations in Downpatrick courthouse on 29 January, 1902. Col. Wallace was proposed by W. Johnston MP, Ballykilbeg, who was the champion of the Orangemen's right to march.<sup>6</sup> James Wood was accompanied by his agent, James Moorehead, and was proposed by J. Carr JP, Killyleagh, and seconded by Rev. W. Carse, Magherahamlet.<sup>7</sup>

Meetings in support of both candidates were held throughout the constituency. About 250 people gathered in the yard of Denvir's Hotel, Downpatrick, to hear James Wood and T. W. Russell, but the meeting in Ballynahinch broke up in disorder.<sup>8</sup> The *Down Recorder*

Killinchy, in what Carson called 'an unholy alliance' of Catholics and Protestants.<sup>13</sup> As we look back over a century to 1902, it is to be remembered that another 104 years earlier these areas were strongholds of the United Irishmen in the 1798 rebellion.

The nature of Wood's support is demonstrated by the names on the illuminated address as well as those reported during the campaign. While Gawn Orr was a doctor in Ballylesson and William Carse a Presbyterian minister in Magherahamlet, many tended to be owners of relatively large farms or were prominent in their own localities. Joseph Carr JP lived at The Gocean in Killyleagh, where his family had founded the Flax Spinning Mill. James Silcock JP owned Marybrook Mill between Crossgar and Ballynahinch. James Hutton JP had a large farm at Bell's Hill and was a leading member of the Downpatrick Board of Poor-Law Guardians. The family tradition of John Clarke JP of Lisnastrain, Lisburn was that he was for the Liberals and against the landlords. If a hat was not doffed when paying rent at Hillsborough Castle, a flunkey would remove it with a stick.<sup>14</sup>

After the declaration of the result, Wood and Russell were carried shoulder high to the Down Hunt Arms Hotel, where they addressed the crowd. Wood said they had been opposed by the strongest possible combination, but they had beaten the press, the landlords and Ballykilbeg (the home of William Johnston, the militant Orange MP for South Belfast). Rev. R. Lyttle of Moneyrea advised people against being led into strife and pointed to the peaceful example shown the previous day when Protestant and Roman Catholic worked side by side for Mr Wood. That night bonfires were lit in various parts of the constituency. The local newspapers differed in their headlines regarding the result. The *Newtownards Chronicle* reported 'Victory for the Compulsory Sale Candidate' while the *Down Recorder* regretted 'A Nationalist Victory'.<sup>15</sup>

The East Down result was a major boost to Russell's campaign for compulsory purchase and his growing support was again demonstrated in a 1903 by-election in North Fermanagh where his candidate, Edward Mitchell, defeated the Official Unionist James Craig.

Wyndham's Land Act of 1903 was the response of Balfour's Conservative government. It was more generous in purchase schemes for both landlords and tenants and, although compulsory purchase was not finally adopted until 1925, it succeeded in removing the land question as a major election issue.<sup>16</sup>

The general election of 1906 was a watershed in British history, with Balfour's Conservative and Unionist Party losing 250 seats in a landslide to the Liberal Party, which gained a large majority over all other parties.<sup>17</sup> The new government of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, including figures such as Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill, was to embark upon one of the great eras of reform. In Ireland three Liberals were returned, holding North Tyrone and South Tyrone (T. W. Russell) and gaining North Antrim. The loss of East Down and North Fermanagh indicated, however, that the Russellite campaign was now in decline.

Although Russell had begun his career in South Tyrone in 1886 as an outspoken Unionist, the land issue caused him to move across the political spectrum, so that by 1906 his followers were clearly identified as Russellite Liberals. Dependent on class, Russellite Liberalism had sought to transcend the religious divide, and appeal to Protestant and Catholic farmers; this worked so long as Protestant farmers had to choose between self-interest and traditional sectarianism. The danger to Russellism came when farmers no longer had to make a clear choice: when the main Protestant party was prepared to offer both sectarian and economic satisfaction.<sup>18</sup> One major outcome of the threat he posed was that the Unionists improved their organisation through the formation of the Ulster Unionist Council – an umbrella body of the Orange Order, constituency associations and MPs – in 1905.<sup>19</sup>

Stations	Voters	For Wallace	For Wood	Nationalists
Ardglass	571	155	416	436
Ballyculter	276	88	188	197
Ballynahinch	707	531	176	152
Crossgar	469	278	191	151
Downpatrick	923	431	492	364
Drumaness	254	50	195	188
Drumbo	692	321	371	4
Dunmore	270	50	220	209
Killinchy	256	107	149	21
Killyleagh	433	218	215	92
Kilmegan	290	151	139	234
Lisburn	774	634	140	202
Saintfield	646	228	418	124
Seaforde	265	124	141	134
Tyrella	170	54	125	126
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7,005</b>	<b>3,429</b>	<b>3,576</b>	<b>2,634</b>

The 1906 election marked the effective end of landlord domination of County Down politics.<sup>20</sup> Unionist candidates now had to be selected by constituency organisations and were no longer the sole preserve of landlord families. The new Unionist Constituency Association in East Down invited the defeated North Fermanagh by-election candidate, James Craig, a Presbyterian businessman, to contest the 1906 election, thus starting a career which would lead to him becoming Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister. Craig polled 4,011 against Wood's 3,341 – a majority of 670. In a 91 per cent poll, Wood's proportion of the vote fell from 51 per cent to 46 per cent.<sup>21</sup>

On 28 September 1906, a banquet was held for James Wood by his East Down supporters in the Wellington Hall, Belfast.<sup>22</sup> Following toasts to 'the King' and 'the Lord Lieutenant (Lord Aberdeen) and Prosperity of Ireland', James Wood was presented with a cheque for £600 (MPs were not paid until 1911) and Mrs Wood with a tea and coffee service in recognition of his services as Member for East Down. After a toast to 'East Down,' Rev. W. Carse related the history of the testimonial to James Wood and said that no fewer than 1,422 individuals had subscribed to the object.<sup>23</sup>

T. W. Russell MP spoke highly in praise of the new House of Commons with a mandate in favour of the application of Liberal principles. He was not quite sure that the strength of the House of Commons was always recognised in these parts, but they must not judge the House of Commons by the quota contributed by the Orange Order. He was glad to see James Wood being honoured and he felt his election in East Down was one of the great turning points in the land war. He ought never to have been lost to the House, but accidents would occur in politics as well as in other things and

they had now to see that the mistakes of the past were repaired, that this great province, with its splendid traditions, its living actualities, and its great capacities, would not be known, as it now unfortunately was, as the most retrograde, stupid, and selfish portion of the United Kingdom in political affairs.<sup>24</sup>

Ulster Liberals continued to be a force in the period of the Liberal government up to the First World War. In 1907, they successfully defended North Tyrone, the most marginal seat in Ireland, despite the majority being reduced from nine votes to seven in a poll of 6,019 – 99 per cent of the electorate!<sup>25</sup> (North Tyrone stayed Liberal from 1895 to 1918.) In 1910, the seats of North Antrim and South Tyrone (T. W. Russell) were lost, but in 1913 Londonderry City was won by David Cleghorn Hogg in a by-election. The last Liberal to be elected from Ireland to Westminster was Sir James Brown Dougherty, who was returned unopposed for Londonderry City in 1914 following Hogg's death. The removal of the land question as a major issue and the return to the constitutional struggle after 1912 reduced Liberal appeal to an increasingly polarised electorate. The First World War and the 1916 Easter Rising changed the political landscape of Ireland. No Liberal contested the 1918 election, which saw the triumph of Sinn Féin and Unionism and, apart from in 1929, when five candidates were defeated, Liberals were absent from the political scene until the late 1950s.

T. W. Russell continued as MP for South Tyrone and later North Tyrone until 1918, serving for eleven years as Liberal Vice-President of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland. He became an Irish Privy Councillor in 1908, a baronet in 1917, and died in 1920.<sup>26</sup>

James Wood contested East Down again in 1910 as a Liberal,

**The 1906 election marked the effective end of landlord domination of County Down politics.**

but lost by 974 votes. He continued as a solicitor with an extensive practice, especially among the farming community. He died on 31 October 1936 at his home, Marino House, Holywood, Co. Down. *The Irish News* reported that regret would be felt throughout Northern Ireland:

Unsparing in his efforts on behalf of the downtrodden small farmers under the regime of landlordism, Mr Wood was a staunch tenant-righter and in that cause he fought as a Liberal a famous election in 1902 in East Down, which he won by a large majority over his opponent, the Orange Order leader, Colonel R. H. Wallace. ... The late Mr Wood proved himself an able supporter of his leader Mr T. W. Russell. He was a keen debater and, as [an] orator fluent in delivery. ... There are few of Mr Wood's contemporaries alive today but those who are will always remember him as a straightforward gentleman, honest in his dealings with his fellows, kindly and broad-minded towards those who differed from him in either religion or politics. In religion a Presbyterian, he was a loyal member of his church, impatient of anything that savoured of oppression or tyranny, of which he was an implacable foe.<sup>27</sup>

After the death of his son in the 1990s, his papers were given to the Linen Hall Library in Belfast, which is now also the home of the illuminated address of a hundred years ago. Perhaps someone will discover the whereabouts of the accompanying silver tea and coffee service from that Belfast banquet of 1906.

*Berkley Farr is a former Chairman of the Ulster Liberal Party and was candidate for South Down in 1973. This article is based on one published in the Lecale Review: a Journal of Down History, in 2006.*

- 1 Address to James Wood, Linen Hall Library, Belfast.
- 2 Details from James Wood archive in Linen Hall Library and *The Irish News*, 3 November 1936.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Frank Thompson, *The End of Liberal Ulster: Land agitation and land reform 1868–86* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2001) p. 297.
- 5 B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), p. 342.
- 6 *The Down Recorder*, 1 February 1902.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 *The Down Recorder*, 8 February 1902.
- 13 Alvin Jackson, 'Irish Unionism and the Russellite Threat, 1894–1906', *Irish Historical Studies*, XXV, no. 100 (Nov. 1987) p. 400.
- 14 Personal communication, Alan Clarke.
- 15 *The Down Recorder* and *The Newtownards Chronicle*, 8 February 1902.
- 16 Thompson, *The End of Liberal Ulster*, p. 298.
- 17 Michael Kinnear, *The British Voter; An Atlas and Survey since 1885* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981) p. 28.
- 18 Jackson, 'Irish Unionism and the Russellite Threat, 1894–1906', p. 397. A study of the relationship between Liberals and Ireland over the last two centuries is to be found in *Journal of Liberal History* 33 (Winter 2001–02), including Berkley Farr on 'Liberalism in Unionist Northern Ireland'.
- 19 Eamon Phoenix, 'On this day', *The Irish News*, 3 November 2005.
- 20 Brian Walker, 'Landowners and Parliamentary Elections in County Down, 1801–1921', *Down History & Society* edited by Lindsay Proudfoot, (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1997) p. 321.
- 21 Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801–1922*, p. 343.
- 22 *The Northern Whig*, 29 September 1906.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 A. D. McDonnell, *The Life of Sir Dennis Henry, Catholic Unionist* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2000) p. 24.
- 26 Jackson, 'Irish Unionism and the Russellite Threat, 1894–1906', p. 403.
- 27 *The Irish News*, 3 November 1936.

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Centenary commemoration supported by the Liberal Democrat History Group

# CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN COMMEMORATION

**Sunday 27 April 2008**  
Meigle (Perthshire)

**The Rt. Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, GCB, 1836–1908**

Sir Henry, born (as Henry Campbell) at Kelvinside House, Glasgow on 7 September 1836; Liberal MP for Stirling Burghs (Stirling, Dunfermline, Culross, Inverkeithing and Queensferry) from 20 November 1868; Prime Minister from 5 December 1905; resigned as Prime Minister on 3 April 1908; died in Downing Street on 22 April and, after a memorial service in Westminster Abbey on 27 April, was buried beside Lady Campbell-Bannerman (died 1906) in Meigle on 28 April 1908.

The Commemoration Programme on Sunday 27 April 2008 will include a visit to Belmont Castle (Sir Henry's last Scottish home) at 11.30 a.m., lunch in Meigle at 1.00 p.m. and a wreath-laying at the Campbell-Bannerman grave beside Meigle Parish Church at 2.30 p.m.

For further details and tickets (for the Belmont Castle visit and lunch), contact **Dr. Sandy Waugh** at: email: s.waugh.bnchry@btinternet.com  
phone: Banchory (01330) 823159  
**before 17 April.**