

ISLAND HOUSE AND FALKINER SMALL

A country house through two centuries

BY ROY COPELAND



Island House “a good example of the type of small Victorian farmstead that is becoming increasingly rare in an unaltered state.”

This is the story of Island House, a farmhouse situated about one mile south-east of Poyntzpass. It’s also the story of one of its inhabitants, Falkiner Brown Small. Island House is at the centre of Fourtowns, a small district based on four townlands. The House itself is in Ballymacarattbeg, but down the garden and over one river you are into Tullymore. Down the fields and over another river, you’re in Killysavan. It has been there for about two hundred years. The first Ordnance Survey map produced in 1835 shows a plan of the farmyard and dwelling house, roughly where the dwelling house is now and with two outhouses, corresponding to what we today call the barn and stables. These 1835 plans also show a well across the road from the farmyard entrance; it was normal for Irish farmhouses to be built across the road from a source of spring water. The structure for the well is still there across the road. It’s no longer in use but that spring and a well still function on the farm.

By 1846 and the time of Griffith’s Valuation a single storey wooden back return had been built onto the dwelling house and some additional farm buildings erected.

Who were the early occupants of Island House?

There is no record of who built the house. The earliest record is occupancy by Robert Gibson in 1828-1840. It would seem that there were a number of Gibsons living in the area then and the Gibson family retained ownership in one name or other through to 1870. Margaret Gibson is listed as owner in Griffith’s Valuation of 1846 and an adjacent farm was owned by Samuel Gibson. We do not know what the relationship was between the two. However, in 1870 the farm changed hands and the tenant became Archibald Marshall, originally from Donaghmore.

Throughout this period the four townlands of Fourtowns were owned essentially by the Clanwilliam family; Ballymacarattbeg and Ballymacarattmore were in the name of the Earl himself. Tullymore and Killysavan in the name of his heir, the Honorable Robert Meade. All occupants until late-1800s were tenants of the Clanwilliams.

Sometime between 1870 and 1874, Archibald Marshall

died and between 1874 and 1888 his relation Samuel James Marshall was the tenant. Samuel James and his wife emigrated to Australia and in 1888 the tenancy changed again. Now we take up the story of the new tenant, Falkiner Brown Small.

The Small Family

At the start of the 1800s, the adjacent farm to Island House, called Island Cottage, was occupied by Robert Cavan, a married man with two daughters. Nancy married David Woods a local business entrepreneur and Martha married Robert Small, one of five sons of Hugh Small of Keady, probably in the 1820s and they had three children Robert (junior), Mary and Maggie.

Robert Junior took over the farm when his father died in 1846 and we next come across him when he bought a Third Class Return ticket from Poyntzpass Railway Station to Newry on Monday 6th November 1863. He and a few neighbours who were heading for Camlough fair took the train to Newry, went to the fair and came back to Newry Station to catch the 4.05 pm train from Dublin. On the station platform a young whippersnapper of a porter, Mr. Forsythe, came up and asked Robert Small for his ticket. Robert Small refused to show it; was asked again and refused again, citing the byelaws of the railway company, which he said stated that you only have to show your ticket either to the guard on the train or to the station master when getting off it. *"On the platform a porter has no right to ask me for my ticket,"* he said. After several more refusals, the porter called the Station Master, Mr. Briggs, who repeated the same request and got the same answer. A stand-off and argument occurred after which Mr. Briggs and Mr. Forsythe got either side of Robert Small and with another porter pushing forced him off the platform and into an alleyway.



An early photograph of Poyntzpass Railway Station

We know these details because the police were called and ten days later Robert Small was up before the magistrates in Newry Petty Sessions being charged with two counts of assault; of the porter and Mr. Briggs. It

was obviously considered a 'juicy' little court case because the local papers printed extensive coverage. At that Petty Sessions, Robert Small was supported by his neighbour James Taylor and Alexander Bryson from Killysavan. Of course the railway company had someone to support the Station Master but some of the newspapers reported that *"the majority of people on the platform would have supported Robert Small, but were too drunk to be credible witnesses"*. Robert Small was found guilty, by a majority of the five or seven magistrates, and fined a guinea on each of count of assault on Mr. Briggs and the porter Mr. Forsythe. He instantly said *"I appeal"*. The appeal came up a month later and the magistrates still found him guilty, though again they were not unanimous.

Robert Small, being a tenacious man who didn't give up easily, started taking civil actions against the Dublin & Belfast Junction Railway Company. On Thursday 7th January 1864 in the quarterly sessions in Markethill he claimed £40 damages. He won his case, received £10 pounds damages and costs, on the basis that the porter did not have the right to ask him for his ticket. The railway company instantly appealed and two months later the appeal came up in Armagh at the Assize Court. It is clear from newspaper reports that the two barristers quickly agreed this was an issue of such seriousness it needed to be settled by a higher court. Robert Small and his barristers were citing a previous case in Bray which went against the railway company, so he kept persisting with his appeal and the judge gave a decision that allowed the case to go to the Court of the Exchequer.

On Thursday 23rd June the case came up in the Court of the Exchequer in Ireland and this time the damages claimed had risen to two hundred pounds. Robert Small won again, was awarded one hundred pounds and costs. That was the end of the legal proceedings. Obviously the railway company admitted defeat. The next time you're walking onto the platform at Newry station and you're asked to show your ticket.....

But between those last two dates, 8th March and 23rd June, on May 1st 1864 Robert Small's wife gave birth to their first son. Apparently there was parental agreement that if the child was a son he would be named after the legal people who fought the cases. Therefore the newborn was called after Mr. Falkiner the barrister, and Mr. Brown the solicitor – hence Falkiner Brown Small.

Robert Small was clearly a pretty good farmer. In 1864, a fortnight or so after the last court case, we find him in the *Belfast Newsletter* reports of Irish Fairs. He had been able to sell twenty bullocks in Poyntzpass Fair for the highest price of eighteen pounds ten shillings each - a good price in a market where the report said trade was bad and most people took their cattle home again. He was also a person who had ambitions and plans for expansion. Two years later we come across him again. This time in connection with Clantalew House, situated between Loughgall and Lough Neagh.

Ralph Obre, the owner of Clantalew House and 1,150 acres of land had got into financial difficulty. In November 1865 he had to sell the contents of the house and put up for rent the 100 acre attached farm. Robert Small must have taken on the lease because next April in the *Belfast Morning News* there is an advertisement seeking a ploughman for Robert Small at Clantalew Farm. Robert, seemingly, planned to move from Island Cottage to Clantalew House. On 10th July 1866 in the *Newry Telegraph* there is an advertisement for the sale of standing crops of flax, oats and hay at Island Cottage, but just four days later, fate intervened. On Saturday 14th July a fatal accident occurred at Clantalew House. Newspaper reports say that Robert Small was engaged in rifle practise when one of his workmen called him away. He set his gun down against a tree and walked away, sorted out his workmen, walked back to the tree, lifted his gun and a shot was fired.

Nobody saw what happened but the outcome was that Robert Small had a bullet through his brain and was dead. It was assumed that he had stumbled. Accidental death was recorded at the subsequent inquest.

Robert Small does appear throughout to have been a nice man. It is interesting that newspaper reports of the court cases of 1863-64 talk about a “*fine young gentleman*”, “*well-liked in the neighbourhood*”. However, for Annabella Small, his wife, life had taken a terrible knock. Annabella, married at eighteen, mother at 20, was now a widow at the age of 22. Life had certainly changed.



Annabella Small nee Ledlie, Robert Small's wife.

Robert Small was a member of the Freemasons. There still exists a very ornate letter of condolence to the widow from his lodge in Tandragee and it is possible the

Masonic Order provided much needed support, because as a widow, Annabella Small was in difficulties. Her father-in-law Robert Small had died in 1846 and her own father William Ledlie of Frankfort House, at the “*Five-mile-hill on the great road from Newry to Banbridge*” had died sometime before as well. She was also carer for George, a younger brother of infirm mind.

Annabella was short of male support and clearly it was impossible for her to run two farms. A month later an advertisement appeared selling all the crops at Clantalew House, which ended that enterprise. Annabella stayed at Island Cottage but it was still a struggle for her even though, we hope, she would have had help from the neighbours, the Taylors of Taylorstown and Wylies of Elm Hill, for instance. In July 1872 she put Island Cottage up for sale, six years after the fatal accident. No sale occurred, they stayed in Island Cottage and there is no record of why there was no sale. Fortunes must have improved a little because in 1878, six years on, records show that Falkiner Small was sent as a boarder to Coleraine Academical Institution.

COUNTY DOWN.
FARM OF LAND FOR SALE, BY PRIVATE CONTRACT.

TO BE SOLD BY PRIVATE CONTRACT, THE Tenant's Interest in that FARM of LAND, situate in the TOWNLAND of TULLYMORE, known as ISLAND COTTAGE FARM, containing 35 Acres, Irish Plantation Measure, held at the Yearly Rent of £42 19s by Mrs. SMALL, under the Trustees of the late Right Honourable Robert Meade.

This Farm is in the highest state of cultivation, the principle part being under Grass. There is a comfortable DWELLING-HOUSE and suitable OFFICE HOUSES on the Farm, in thorough Repair.

Island Cottage is situate within one mile of Poyntzpass Railway Station, and six from the market towns of Newry and Banbridge.

Proposals will be received on FRIDAY, the 2nd August, 1872, at Two o'clock, by Mrs. SMALL, on the Premises. The Purchaser to be approved of by GEORGE BRUSH, Esq., Agent to the Property.

A Deposit of £100 at time of Sale.
Island Cottage, 13th July, 1872. 8504

July 1872 Island Cottage for sale

It's unknown how long he stayed there and afterward one assumes he came back to Island Cottage and took up farming, because in 1888, he took over the tenancy of Island House, the neighbouring farm. Island Cottage had approximately 50-60 acres and Island House roughly the same, so he was almost doubling his acreage. Taking over Island House tenancy was a matter of keeping it in the family. We mentioned earlier that Robert Small had two sisters, Mary and Maggie. Mary Small married John Marshall from Lakeview house, Donaghmore in 1861 and when he died she married Samuel James Marshall, his relation. Thus, when F B Small took over the tenancy, he was following in his uncle's footsteps.

F B Small took over the tenancy in 1888 and continued farming. Sometime at the end of the 1800s, according to his reminiscences in later years, he accompanied an

uncle on his business trips to north-west England. In Liverpool he saw the produce market, where fruits, vegetables and fowl were sold. Seeing the prices turkeys were making in that market F.B. thought he could produce or buy turkeys in Ireland, take them to Liverpool and sell them to the traders at profit. The next year he gathered up enough turkeys, probably a hundred or so, got them on the boat along with himself and headed for Liverpool. However, the weather was bad, the boat was delayed and by the time they docked and got to the market, it was about over. The traders didn't want his turkeys. So, being a resourceful man, F.B. somehow picked a vantage point, took his turkeys, rubbed a little flour into them to spruce them up and make them look better, held them up and started selling. He got rid of a few at the start, dirt-cheap, drew a crowd, sold all his turkeys and appreciated that he could make money this way and that he had some ability at selling things. He said that that experience took him into auctioneering at which he became very successful.

AUCTIONEER, VALUATOR, AND COMMISSION AGENT.

FALKINER B. SMALL

ISLAND HOUSE, POYNTZPASS,

HAVING RECENTLY TAKEN OUT a License for the above, hopes to receive the Patronage and Support of his Friends and the Public.

Any Commissions entrusted to him will receive his Prompt and Careful Attention.

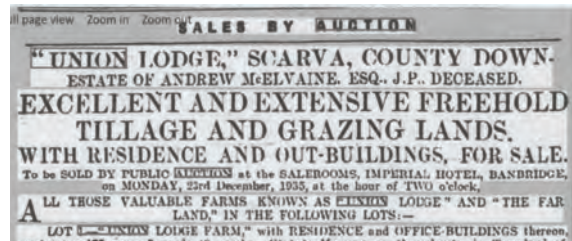
Office : 2, KILDARE STREET, NEWRY.
628

November 1901. F.B. Small's advertisement.

In 1901 he obtained an auctioneer's licence. Looking at newspapers of the time, business was slow initially, because adverts promoting his auctioneering services appear spring and autumn for two and a half years, but by 1906 he's clearly established. Then there is an advert for a sheriff's sale of horses in Belfast - presumably like cars today, repossessed for some reason. The other one is a bankruptcy sale for the Newry Traction Company. He also started an annual autumnal grand sale of livestock at Island House. His auctioneering business continued until around 1940. During that period he sold farms for some notable people in the locality, for example, a dispersal sale for Henry Thomson in Scarvagh Demesne; horse-drawn vehicles for the Cooke-Cross and Innes family of Dromantine House.

A notable establishment in Poyntzpass village came up for sale in 1919 and FB Small sold the Railway Hotel in June of that year. (It became Henry Clarke's shop on the site of the current Baptist Church.) When the Innes' of Dromantine were forced to leave by the IRA in 1920, it was FB Small who had the sale of the land to the tenants. Later in his career, in 1935, he handled the

sale of Lisnabrague Lodge. There were many more. He had a very extensive auctioneering business, with, at times, offices in Newry, Rathfriland, and Banbridge. Right up until 1928 he was actively promoting auctioneering, for example, writing to the council in Lurgan asking for permission to start a pig sale there, which was a success.



Notice of the sale of Lisnabrague Lodge, 23rd November 1935.



Fourtowns National School 1939

Front Row, Left to Right:

1. Norman Purdy 2 Brian Cooke, 4. Josephine Agnew, 3. Phyllis Bryson, 5. David Burns, 6. Andy Johnston, 7. George Bicker : 2nd Row 1. John Agnew, John Johnston 3. ? 4. Gualt Purdy, 5. May McAllister 6. ? 7. ? 8. George Burns : Back Row: 1. Meta Copeland, 2. Gertie McAllister, 3. ? Ingram, 4. Ernest Smart, 5. Robert Purdy

So, he had the instincts of a good business man but he still retained involvement with farmers and farming. He was an active member of both the Jerrettspass Farmers' Association and Newry Agricultural Society as well as a frequent exhibitor of sheep at local shows.

While agriculture and farming were interests he held all his lifetime he was also civic-minded. As Governor of Fourtowns National School in 1914 he advocated the building of a new schoolhouse. The school eventually moved to new premises in 1933. FB Small was also involved in politics; being on Newry Council as a Presbyterian Unionist; on the Board of Guardians of Newry Workhouse; a Justice of the Peace, and photographed at a meeting of landowners in the Ulster

Hall, Belfast seeking reduced Land Commission rents.

The 1866 advert listing crops for sale at Island Cottage showed the Smalls were growing flax and F.B. Small kept up his interest in the crop. At one time, he owned or part-owned at least three scutching mills; one at Meenan, (where Dask Timber is now on the A1); Silverford Mill on the Gilford Road out of Loughbrickland; and with a man called Robert Potts he part-owned a scutching mill at Tullyha, close to Belleeks, west of Newry. It was burnt down and he successfully claimed against Armagh Council for the arson attack.

In the end, flax almost broke him financially, because through World War I and the 1920s he developed a trade buying scutched flax and selling it to a merchant in London. The merchant and FB Small agreed a price in late summer each year, then F.B. would buy the flax here in Northern Ireland and ship it to London. That continued well until one year in the 1930s there was a large slump in price between the time the price was fixed with the merchant and the flax was shipped. The merchant reneged on the deal with the age-old excuse of "poor quality". F.B. was left with many, many tons of flax that he couldn't sell. There is actually still some of that flax about today, so those of you who need a few tons.....

Whilst the loss didn't break him it was a great financial setback.



Jane Ledlie

Private life

What of F.B.'s private life? His mother was Annabella Ledlie and F.B. kept it in the wider family by marrying Jane Ledlie of Derrywilligan House, Mullaghglass in 1898. They had six children, Bertie, William, Thomas, Lily, Norman and Flora, between 1899 and 1907. A

couple of years after the last child was born, fate intervened again in the Small family.

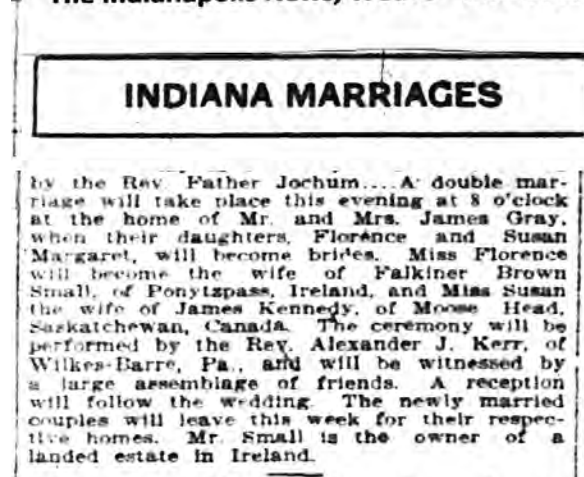
Newspapers reported a sad affair at Poyntzpass where Jane Ledlie died accidentally by poisoning, having mistaken belladonna for medicine she was taking. The youngest child was just two years old.



Newspaper report 7th November 1909

Three years later, F.B. took ship to America, sometime in 1912, going to Indiana to marry a girl called Florence Gray. You might think that's a long way to go to find a wife, especially as she came from Loughbrickland in the first place. F.B. had been land steward for their father so he wasn't heading across the world to somebody totally new.

The Indianapolis News, Wed. 5th June 1912



The Indianapolis News, 5th June 1912.

Moreover Florence had been on a visit back to Ireland in 1911. In a report of their wedding in the Indianapolis News, Mr. Small is described as "the owner of a landed estate in Ireland" and "is taking his bride to a fine ancestral home" – technically correct!

F.B. remained married to Florence Gray for the rest of his life and she outlived him by half a dozen years or so.



Florence Small with F.B.'s daughters.

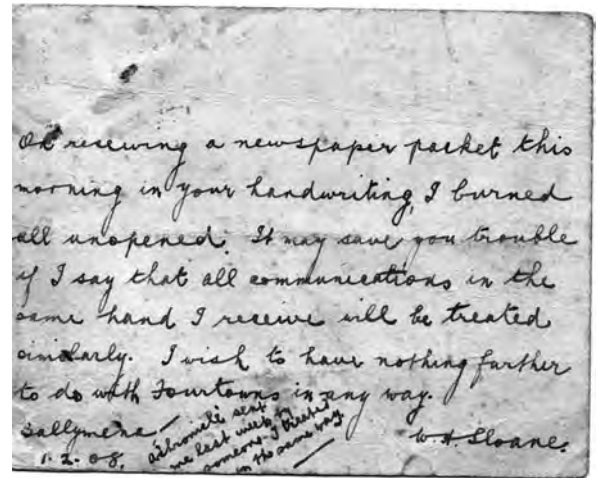


The Reverend W.R.Sloane.

The Smalls were Presbyterian and always members of Fourtowns Presbyterian Church. In the 1901 census, Rev. W.R. Sloane, minister of the church, was a lodger at Island House. He must have had a close association with F.B. as he installed him as an Elder and Clerk of Sessions in the church in 1902. Moreover F.B. was instrumental in the purchase of a farm adjacent to the church as a manse. It seems, however, that the relationship between the two men went sour because the Reverend Sloane left Fourtowns in the autumn of 1907 and went to Harryville church, Ballymena.

In February of the following year, F.B. received from Ballymena a postcard which is still in the Small family archives. In the Rev. Sloane's hand writing is this text;

On receiving a newspaper packet this morning in your handwriting I burned all unopened. It may save you trouble if I say that all communications I receive in the same hand will be treated similarly. I wish to have nothing further to do with Fourtowns in any way. W R Sloane, Ballymena, 1-2-08



Original Postcard

It is evident from this text that relations had totally broken down. Clearly the Fourtowns wasn't to everyone's liking!

FB Small came to Island House as a tenant in 1888 but in 1903 he bought it and Island Cottage from the Land Commissioners. His ownership continued until 1918 when he moved away. John McComb of Poyntzpass regularly bought cattle for F.B. and in 1918 he told him about a farm near Maralin that was for sale. John McComb said it was good land and that he "had been over it." The property was up for auction in The Brownlow Arms Hotel in Lurgan and a rival auctioneer was selling it. As F.B. thought his rival would ignore any bid from him he asked T. B. Wallace, a solicitor from Newry, to act for him in the auction whilst F.B. and his neighbour James Wylie of Elm Hill sat in a car outside. F.B. had given Wallace a ceiling of £10,000. The talk in the car indicated bids might go above that so F.B. wrote a note "Discretion to go another £100". He gave the note to James Wylie to take into the auction room, but between the car and the room, James scribbled out the "discretion" and wrote "Be the highest bidder". Which is how F.B. Small became owner of Drumcro House for the princely sum of £10,400!

He had obviously become a relatively affluent man by then because family records suggest that he didn't need to borrow any money to pay that £10,400. As he sold Island House for £5,500 the difference in price was in his bank; a substantial sum for that time.

Although F.B.'s relationship with the Reverend Sloane may have broken down, clearly that was not so with the general congregation of Fourtowns Presbyterian Church, because on his departure from the Fourtowns, they presented him with a very ornate address.

F.B. lived until 1953. He was buried in the Small family plot in Fourtowns church graveyard with his mother, his two wives, an uncle and two of his sons. His two daughters are also in the graveyard, albeit in the graves of the Bryson families into which they married.

What then of Island House and FB Small's influence on it?

First of all we believe he named it Island House; a transfer of the *Island* name from his birthplace when the family moved from Island Cottage sometime after 1888.

Second he renovated the whole house and garden between 1901 and 1911. The Census record of 1901 states that the front of Island House had five windows whereas in the 1911 Census there are seven windows. Which means that FB Small built the front porch between those dates. As the style of woodwork inside the porch matches that throughout the house it suggests the whole house was renovated; a two storey back return was built, probably using stone from the Island Cottage dwelling house; a back porch was added and the garden was restructured.

The exterior of the house has changed very little since then; what you see today is largely the character F.B. imposed on it. Fortunately the interior has been updated several times. For example, the 1900s photo has no soil pipe where it leads from the present-day bathroom. Thus F.B. and his family must have continued with the outside toilet in the garden, now a toolshed.

FB Small left Island House in 1918 and sold it to Robert Little Wilson who must have come from Rostrevor, because the 1911 Census lists only two RL Wilsons in the whole of Ireland and they were father and son living in the townland of Rostrevor Upper.



Ralph James (Jim) Copeland and John Wilson

Mr. Wilson kept the house for only a year, why we don't know. Then it was up for public sale again, the

auctioneer being FB Small. It was bought by Samuel Joseph McClements of Loughbrickland who also only kept it for a year. The sale prices stated on the deeds of the house stay steady; both owners just moved the property on.

In 1920 the house was bought by Robert Copeland, who moved from a farm on the east of Ballymacarattbeg to Island House on the western edge of the same townland.

Copelands had been in that part of the Fourtowns from early 1800s and may have moved to there from Drumantine, as mid-1700s records of the Innes family in Drumantine House list Copelands as tenants.

Robert had two sons, John and Jim. Jim bought Roughan Lodge at Ballyrone in December 1942 and married Olive Bryson of Fourtowns House in 1943. When Robert Copeland died in 1942 John inherited both Island Cottage and Island House farms in 1942. Because of the financial problems in the 1930s, and an accumulation of debt, John thought he couldn't make a go of it, so he invited Jim back in 1947. Jim Copeland came back to the house from Roughan Lodge in May 1947 and the farm was split between the brothers; John continuing to own the Island Cottage part.

The return of Olive and Jim Copeland to Island House was notable for two gifts. First, on their departure from Roughan Lodge they were presented with three small chairs by Collins Bronte, a descendant of the brother of Patrick Bronte; a gift for Ruth, Helen and Roy, children born at Roughan Lodge. Only one chair is left at Island House; the other two went to Sheila and Sydney Hall when their twins were born.

The other gift was a silver salver presented to them by a few neighbours and friends on their return to Island House. That is still in Island House and hopefully that will continue for quite some time.

Roy returned to Island house in 1989 on the death of his father and looked at the vegetable patch which is huge. He'd had a bellyful of digging that patch every springtime. His mother would say "*Roy, I've a wee job for you in the garden*". About six hours of hard slog later it would be done. Brother Ian's memory of the garden probably is much the same. Hence the garden has been downsized and changed quite a bit. Apologies to FB Small.

Island House itself, though, is still very much in the character of FB Small. Three years ago it was listed by the Environmental Heritage Agency because it is a "*good example of the type of small Victorian farmstead that is becoming increasingly rare in an unaltered state.*"

Is that final phrase a compliment to FB Small for the quality of his renovation in 1900, or a terrible comment about the Copelands, who've now been custodians of the house for the past century?