

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



LUKE LIVINGSTONE MACASSEY (1843-1908)

Civil Engineer and Barrister

Luke Livingstone Macassey was born in Carrickfergus in 1843. He studied engineering in England and Belfast before setting up as a Consulting Engineer in Rosemary Street in 1871.

During the nineteenth century the population of Belfast grew from 22,000 in 1807 to 270,000 in 1890. Such a leap in population created many problems, one of which was the increasing need for a reliable supply of water for domestic and industrial use. During the century there were several outbreaks of cholera and many deaths from typhoid.

In 1840 the Belfast and District Water Commissioners body was set up with the express purpose of ensuring such a supply. In 1874 they appointed Macassey as their consultant hydraulic engineer. He designed and built reservoirs above Carrickfergus and Lisburn which were sufficient for Belfast's needs until the 1890, when it became clear that drastic action was required. In 1891 the Commissioners instructed Macassey to advise on the position. He investigated five possible sources of water supply and ruled out four of them, including Lough Neagh. He recommended that a virtually inexhaustible supply from the Mourne be implemented in two stages. Firstly, a pipeline supply directly from the Annalong and Kilkeel rivers followed by storage reservoirs to be built later. His proposals were accepted. The pipeline began to deliver water to the Knockbracken reservoir in the 1905 and after a monumental struggle the Silent Valley reservoir was completed in 1933. Belfast has had a plentiful water supply ever since.

In the mid-1880 Macassey became a Barrister with a large parliamentary practice in Westminster. At the same time he moved his practice to Chichester Street. He also authored three books, on law and water supply.

Macassey died after a short illness on 9 May 1908 at his home in Cadogan Park, Belfast. His professionalism and foresight has made an incalculable contribution to the development, prosperity and health of Belfast over the past one hundred years.

Patrick Devlin