



SOLIS™
LOUGH ESKE CASTLE
COUNTY DONEGAL, IRELAND

HISTORY of the CASTLE



The Lough Eske area is closely identified with the O'Donnell family and with the turbulent times of the middle ages. In a woodland to the Northern side of the Castle you can see a portion of the ruins of a Castle which belonged to the O'Donnell family. Prior to moving to Lough Eske, and into what is this old ruin today, the family seat was at Murvagh, which is now home to one of Donegal's best championship links golf course. The O'Donnell Family moved from Lough Eske into the Castle in Donegal Town around the 1470's. The Annals of the Four Masters put the earliest mention of the family in Donegal Town at 1474, when both Donegal Abbey and Donegal Castle were built, so it is widely accepted that Lough Eske was their home prior to this date. Lough Eske remained an important site for the O'Donnell clan as they kept their "island prison" on the Lough. The O'Donnell's held court in Donegal for 133 years after Donegal Castle and Donegal Abbey were built and it wasn't until 1607 that their reign came to an end with the Flight of the Earls from Rathmullen on the 14th of September of that year. Before going, the O'Donnell's and O'Neill's partially destroyed Donegal Castle to prevent the English from using it.

The "Flight of the Earls" led to the plantation of Ulster. O'Donnell Castle and their lands were given to an English Captain, Basil Brooke, who lived in the Castle for a period of time, and who eventually moved to Lough Eske.

In 1861 the new Lough Eske Castle was built on the site of the old Brooke mansion, which was itself a rebuilding of the original Jacobean house. A date stone of 1621 with the initials W.H and I.M remain in the castle yard to this day. Until the Castle was saved from destruction by its present owners, it rose through the surrounding forest in ruined grandeur, a tranquil reminder of an Ireland long deceased. Although it had only its outer walls remaining the Castle is a tribute to the talented stonecutters and masons who erected it. It was built in the Elizabethan style and designed by the architect Mr. Fitzgibbon-Louch C.E of Sackville St. in Derry and the contractor was Mr. Albert Williams. All the stone for the ornamental stonework came from Monaghan's Quarry in Drimkeelan near Frosses and the road from there to Lough Eske was actually built to transport the sandstone or freestone for the Castle, this road measured 16 feet in depth in some places to support the mammoth load and to this day is called Lough Eske Road. Mr. Brooke even brought two Clydesdale horses with cockney drivers from England to draw the stone. Mr. Brooke's ancestors had come to own the Lough Eske estate in 1717 through a marriage with the Lough Eske Knox's. Thomas Brooke who built the castle was not a Brooke by birth. He was born Thomas Young but changed his name to inherit the property.

The Brooke coat of arms still stands over the door on the east and main entrances & the tower is an impressive part of the Castle's architecture and dominates the whole building and adjoining countryside. The tower held the flagstaff where the family flag would have flown, visible for miles around. Beneath the battlements, all along the front of the castle were a line of finely carved gargoyles faces no two alike, their purpose was to throw the water off the roof through their mouths well out on the castle street. During the time that the estate belonged to the forestry department, most of the gargoyles were stolen.

Col. De Vere Brooke inherited the estate in 1884 and remained here for 10 years but the Brooke dominance ended in Lough Eske in 1894 when the estate was purchased by General George White. The most infamous of the White family while in residence was Major General Henry White, he developed a great love for the area, so much so that he requested to be buried close by the lake. That request was fulfilled and his place of burial is marked by a magnificent Celtic high cross. The burial site is bounded by a wall and railings with double gates at the entrance which bear plaques. One of these carries the figure of a pelican, the symbol of mortality, with the inscription "Beware in Time". The second plaque bears the inscription "Virtus Semper Vincit" (Virtue Always Conquers) an appropriate motto for a Major General who fought his last battle. The burial plot is maintained with the help of an interest derived

from a bequest invested in the representative church body donated by Mrs. S.G Barnes, sister of the Major General.

The Knee family were the next owners of the Castle and as a sign of things to come they operated it as a hotel from 1930 to 1939. The story goes that one day in 1939 a curtain blowing in the wind in the ballroom caught fire from a candle that hadn't been extinguished, the ballroom and billiards room were destroyed, and by the time the fire brigade was able to attend (it had to come from Derry) most of that wing of the castle had been destroyed. After this the Knee family decided to leave Lough Eske and sold the estate to Mr. Scott Swan who's own home had just been taken over by the state run electricity supply board via compulsory acquisition as they planned to build a huge hydro electric plant and harness the massive power of the Cathleen Falls which Mr. Swan's home, Stonewald overlooked.

Mr. Swan sold the castle to an American, Mr. Bernard Etzin, who also owned Ardnamona House but in the early 1980's the castle and estate were taken over by a semi-state body Coillte Teo, set up to develop commercial forestry. The forestry commission had little interest in the actual castle itself so it fell in to a state of complete dereliction, when the present owners bought the estate all that remained were the outer walls. Trees had sprung up through the inside of the castle and their strengthening roots threatened to knock the castle down altogether.

After 18 months and one of the biggest financial investments Donegal has ever seen, we are proud to present you with Solis Lough Eske Castle, a phoenix from the ashes and a tranquil haven for rest and relaxation. We have faithfully recreated the interiors of the public rooms to give you an elegant early 20th century Edwardian country mansion and our bedrooms, spa and conference and banqueting facilities showcase the very best of 21st century contemporary good taste.

It's all here for you and your guests to enjoy!