

# ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



**Survey Report: No. 40**

**Survey of Reavy House Site at Divis,  
County Antrim  
UAS/13/01**



**In association with**



**Randal Scott**

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## 1. Summary

### 1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken of a vernacular house ruin, the Reavy House, by the Ulster Archaeological Society (UAS) in collaboration with the National Trust. It is also locally known as the “Hatchet House”. The survey was carried out on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2013. The site lies within the National Trust Divis and Black Mountain property and is some 400 metres to the SSW of the Warden’s Base, also known as Divis Barn. The site is in the townland of Divis, Irish Grid reference J272 740, and very near to the boundaries of the townlands of Hannahstown and Black Mountain.

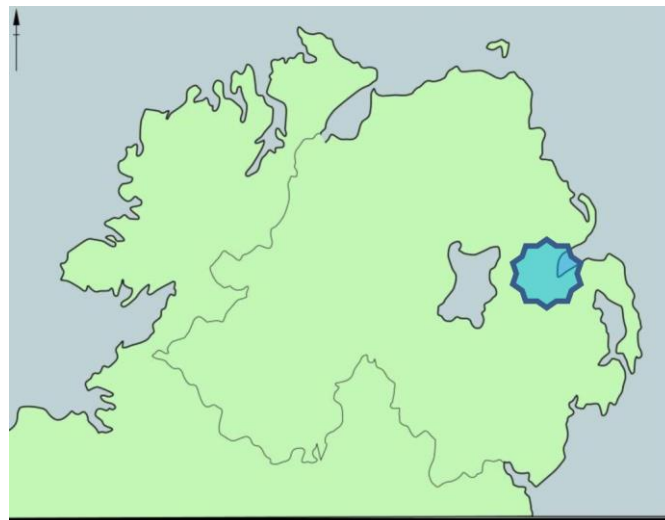


Fig. 01. Location map for Divis and Black Mountain

Local folk memory and history associates this site, along with other possibilities at an area known as the “Hatchet Field”, as the location for a triple murder carried out in February 1753. The murder weapon was an axe, or hatchet. A newspaper report of the event has been located and describes a triple murder at a dwelling “situate near the White Rock on the Black Mountain.” The earliest available map for Divis and Black Mountain, the James Crow map for Lord Donegall produced in 1767 – 70, shows a dwelling at the survey site. However, the newspaper report suggests that the “Hatchet Field” /White Rock area was a more likely location for the murders.

This was one of several planned surveys carried out by members of the UAS. A number of these have been in the National Trust Divis and Black Mountain property and include four other vernacular house sites, cairns and a cashel.

This survey was the 40<sup>th</sup> undertaken by members of the UAS since 2006 and took place during 2013.



Fig. 02 View of the site with Divis and Divis Lodge in the background, looking from south to north

## 1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of the survey were to produce accurate plan drawings of the vernacular house and carry out a photographic survey. This information was compiled into a report and copies submitted to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the National Trust and to the archives of the UAS.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

The survey of the vernacular Reavy House was undertaken on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2013. It was carried out by members of the UAS in response to a decision taken by the committee of the society to extend an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments that had not previously been recorded. This followed a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of survey equipment were purchased. During discussions with Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, it was noted that many archaeological sites on National Trust property had not been subject to a detailed survey. It was agreed that members of the society

would commence a programme to survey these sites and the Reavy House was chosen for the 2013 survey season.

## 2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

As far as is known, there have not been any previous archaeological excavations or surveys at this site. Other monuments have been archaeologically surveyed within the National Trust Divis and Black Mountain property by the UAS, including other vernacular house sites; House Site 1, UAS Survey No 11; Divis Farm, UAS Survey No 25; Johnston's Green, UAS Survey No 39; and Divis Barn, UAS Survey No 41.

## 2.3 Cartographic Evidence

The earliest available cartographic evidence for a house on this site is in a James Crow Map produced for Lord Donegall in 1767 – 70 (PRONI D835/1/3/2&28). A house is shown close to where the Big River crosses from Divis to Hannahstown townland and is on the north side of the river. On this map the house, while just inside Divis, is very close to the boundary with both Black Mountain and Hannahstown.

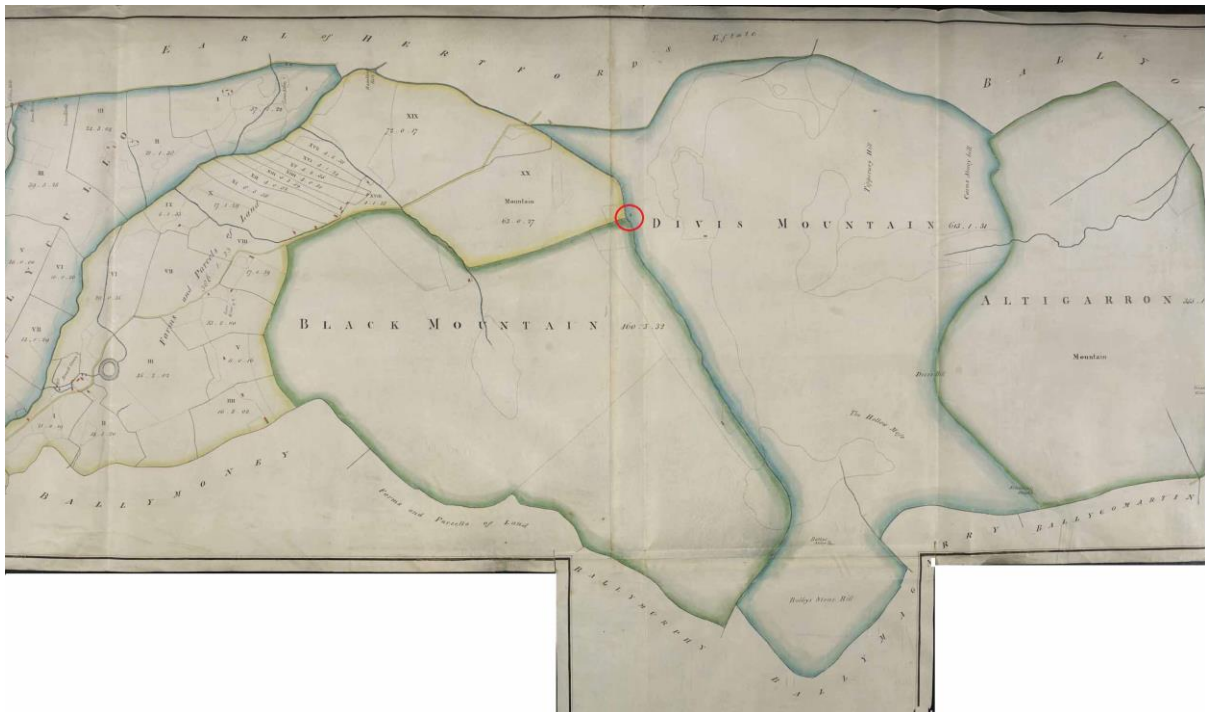


Fig. 03. Section of the James Crow Map of 1767 – 70

The house is again shown in “A Map of Belfast Mountains belonging to William Hunter Esq” produced by Thomas Pattison in 1820 (PRONI D3566/1). The house is located on the north side of the river. However, in this map the boundary between Black Mountain and Divis is

redefined and more closely follows the townland boundaries indicated in later Ordnance Survey Maps. The result is that the house is still very close to the boundary with Hannahstown but a little further away from the Black Mountain boundary – about 400 metres.

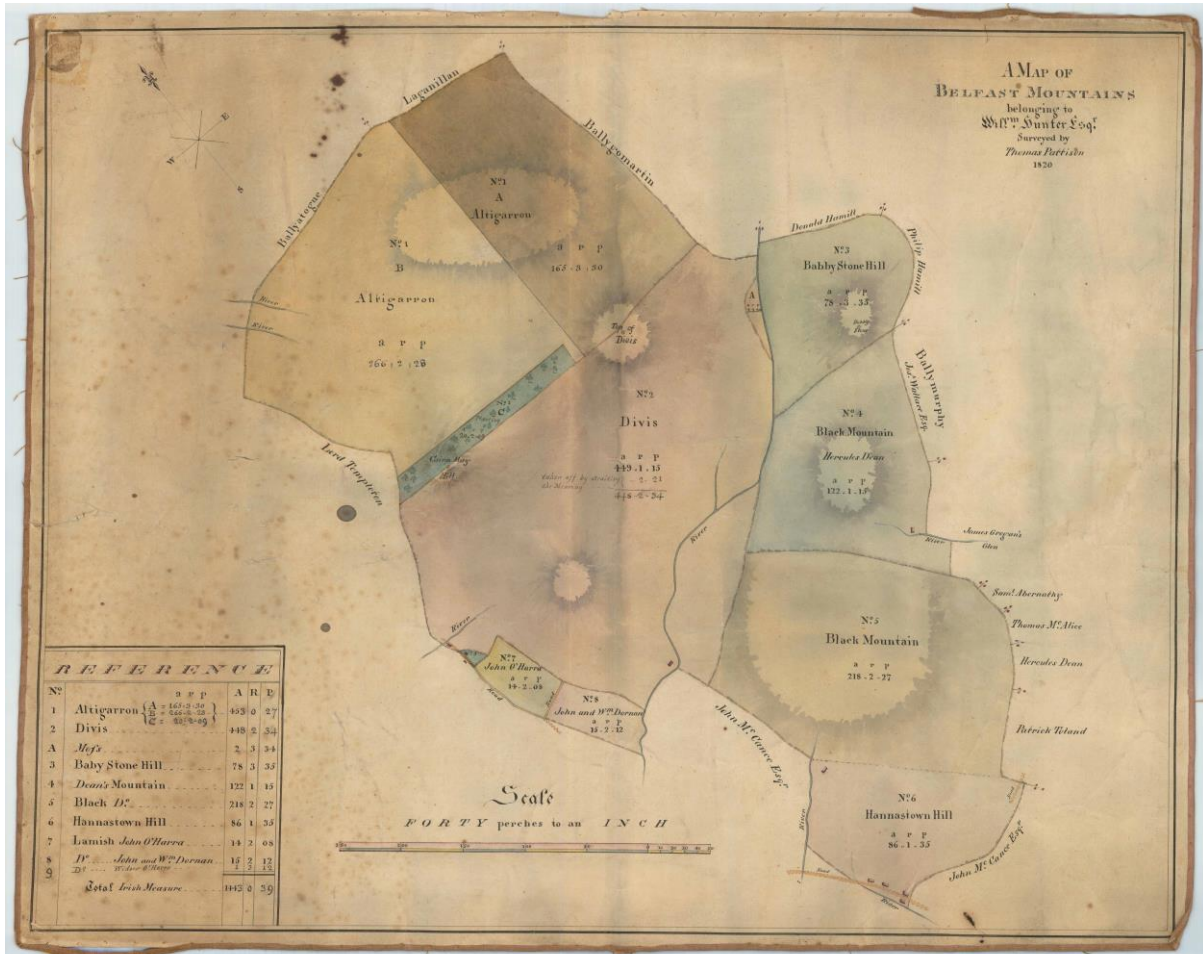


Fig. 04. Section of the Thomas Pattison Map of 1820

The Reavy House is marked on the 1833 Ordnance Survey (OS) County Series Antrim Sheet 60. On this map there is also an adjacent building of which no trace remains at ground level. The adjacent building is also absent from subsequent OS maps. The boundaries between the Divis, Hannahstown and Black Mountain townlands can be clearly seen.



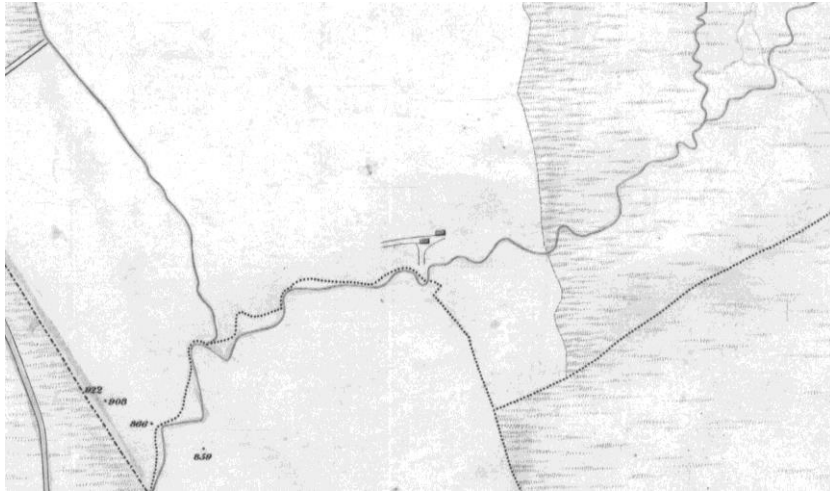


Fig. 05. OS County Series Antrim Sheet 60 (part of) 1833

The 1857 Ordnance Survey map shows the Reavy House. It also names the Big River and annotates an area called “Whitesides” further upriver and to the east of the Reavy House.

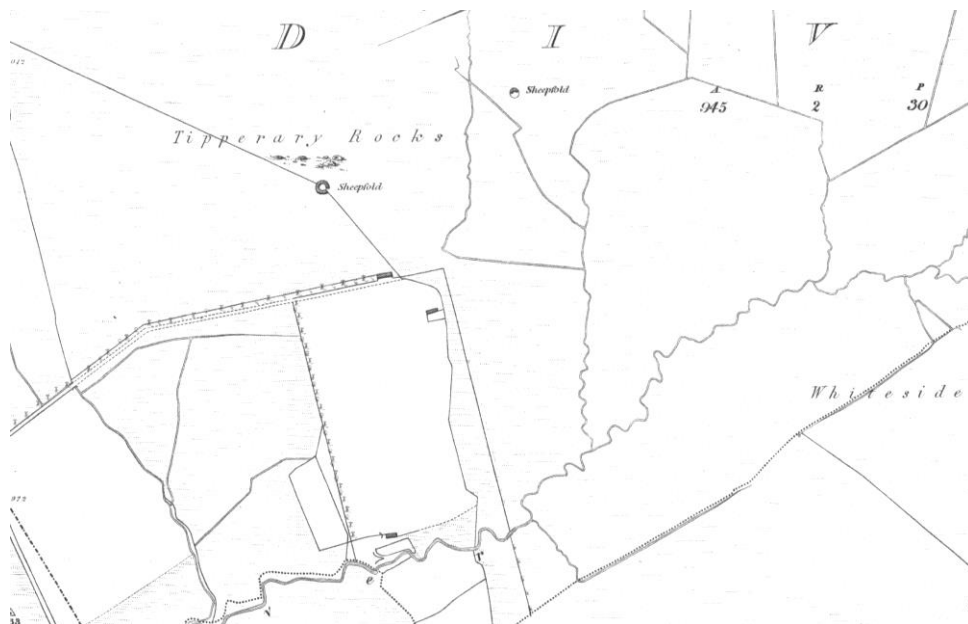


Fig. 06. OS County Series Antrim Sheet 60 (part of) 1857

The house is shown on the 1901 OS revision map, together with an area of tree plantation south of the house and between the house and the river.

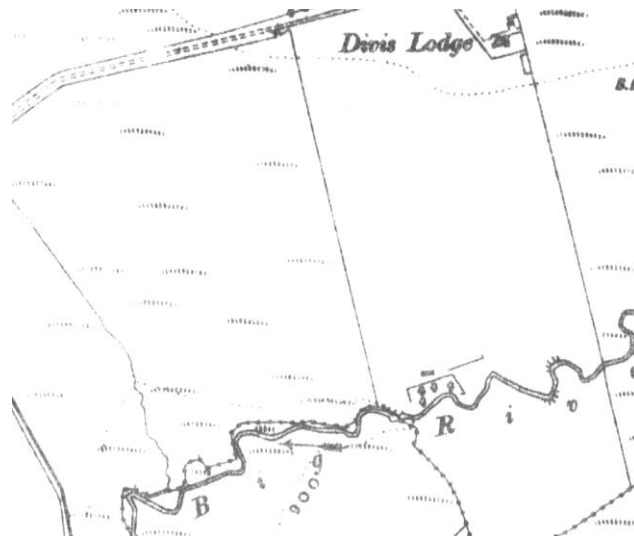


Fig.07. OS County Series Antrim Sheet 60 (part of) 1901

## 2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Belfast Hills Partnership, the National Trust and the Ulster Archaeological Society. All site records have been archived by the National Trust at Rowallane, Saintfield, County Down.

## 2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and included Colin Boyd, Olive Campbell, Michael Catney, Mal Conway, Alexander Cupples, Ian Gillespie, Lee Gordon, Mary Mulvenna, Conor Murphy, Janna McDonald, Liz McShane, Pat O'Neil, George Rutherford and Randal Scott. The UAS is particularly grateful to Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access on the day.

## 3. The 2013 UAS Survey

### 3.1 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of the production of plan drawings accompanied by a photographic survey. This report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources in addition to background documentary material.

### 3.2 Production of plan drawings

A plan drawing was completed, using data obtained from the field survey. Measurements were obtained by using the method of tapes and off-sets. A detailed plan at 1:100 Scale was compiled on site by recording the measurements on drafting film. The field plans were later transferred to a computer based format for printing.

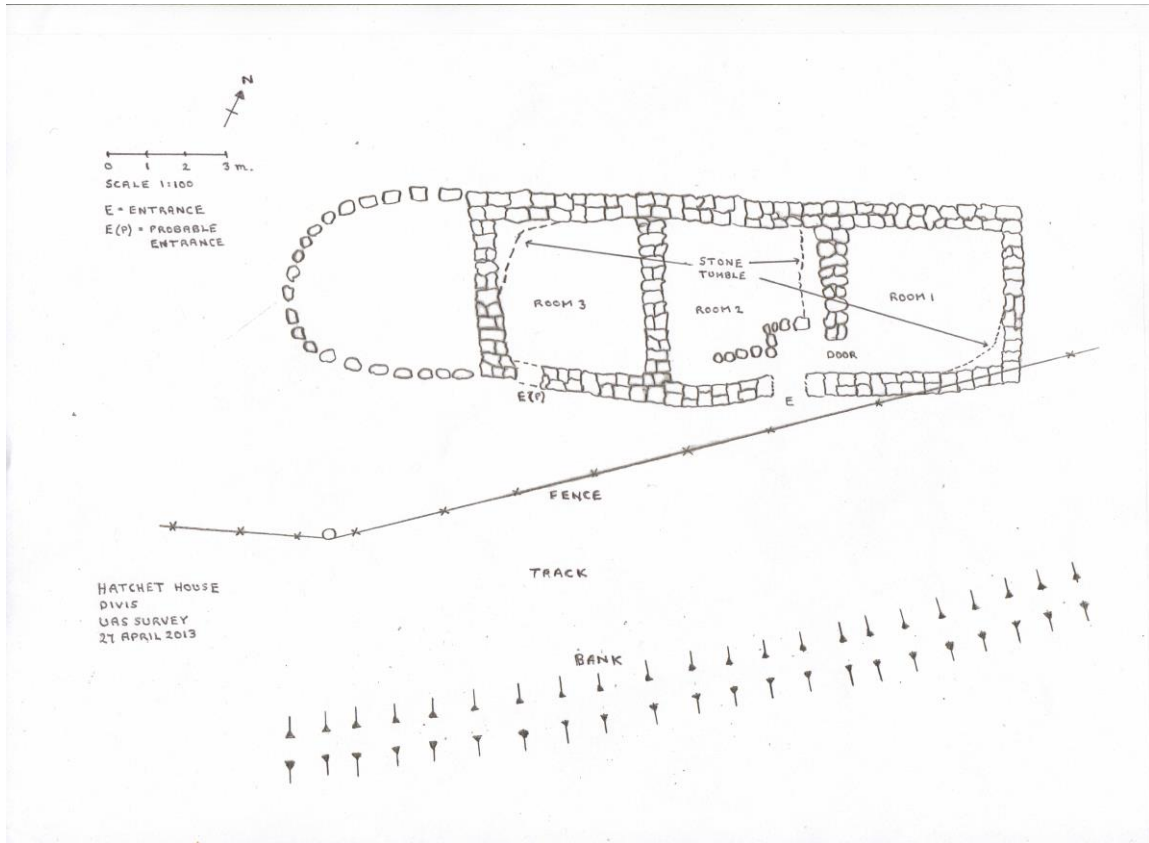


Fig. 08. Plan of the Reavy House



Fig. 09. Survey team at work on site, view looking west

### 3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a Nikon D700 12 megapixel digital camera and a Ricoh G600 8 megapixel camera. A photographic record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 27 April 2013. The archive has been compiled in Jpeg format, saved to compact disc and also to a UAS portable hard drive.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Background

The Reavy House is located in the Big River river valley which rises and flows between Divis and Black Mountain. The Big River is the major one of the head waters of the Collin River which flows on through Dunmurry and into the Lagan. The Collin River was an important source of power for the industrial development of Belfast in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Big River headwaters were dammed at this time to control water flows to the mills and industrial sites further downstream.

The Black Mountain, Divis and Altigarron areas were part of Lord Donegall's estates and these areas were surveyed and mapped by James Crow in 1767 – 70 (see 2.3). This map indicates a house at the Reavy House site. There are also two other isolated sites indicated: one in the approximate area of Divis Lodge/Divis Barn (UAS Survey Report No 41) and another is further up the Big River valley and could be in the vicinity of Johnsons Green (UAS Survey Report No 39). These houses are situated in the rough grazing of the mountain area and were probably occupied by herdsman or drovers. All around the mountain area, to the South West, South and East, the land is divided into "Farms and Parcels of Land".

The Reavy House continues to be indicated on future maps through the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see 2.3). Somewhere around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a small portion of land between the house site and the river was planted with trees, probably for shelter. The 1901 Ordnance Survey map shows the plantation and a few mature trees, beech and ash, are still on the site today.

### 4.2 Survey Findings

#### 4.2.1 The House

The vernacular house was built of stone, probably in a dry stone manner: no evidence for the use of mortar or cement was found on site. However, the walls are considerably tumbled, with the remaining portions covered with moss and overgrown with grass. It was possible to distinguish the overall outline of the walls among the large amount of tumbled stone which was lying both inside and around the outside walls. The house was built with large stones and would have been typical of the more substantial cottages of its period. A plan drawing of the house "footprint" is shown in Fig. 08 (see 3.2).

The house had three rooms, arranged lengthways and in an approximately east-west orientation (ENE – WSW). It is located on a gentle downward west facing slope, going downwards from Room 1 to Room 3. This can be clearly seen in the photograph in Fig. 09. The house is about 14 metres in overall length. The three rooms are approximately square with internal dimensions ranging from 3.5 to 4 metres. Fig. 10 shows the site viewed from the west and facing east up the slope. The Divis television transmitter masts can be seen in the background.



Fig. 10. Site viewed from the west looking east

There is a gap in the south wall of the house leading into Room 2. This could have been an entrance giving access to Rooms 1 and 2. There is an arrangement of stones just inside the entrance to Room 2 which may have acted as a foundation for a partition wall; again a feature seen in some cottages of the period. These stones can be seen in Fig. 11.



Fig. 11. View of stones inside Room 2

Room 3 has a possible entrance at its south west corner. It does not appear to be enterable from Room 2 suggesting that it may have been an “outhouse”, possibly for animals (pigs?). Fig. 12 shows Room 3 and the substantial corner wall stones, viewed from the south west. The possible entrance can be seen immediately to the right of the large corner stones.



Fig. 12. Room 3 and south west corner of the house

There is a semi – circle of large stones located at the west end of the house. This may have delineated an area used as a peat fuel store or a midden.

#### 4.2.2 The surrounding area

The house is situated in an area of unimproved grass, reeds and bog. It is about 50 metres from the river valley, with a steep bank of about 6 or 7 metres down to the river. The area to the south of the house, and between the house and the river, has been planted with trees; see Fig. 07, 1901 OS Map and photograph in Fig. 02. A track and bank runs between the house and river and is shown on the site plan, Fig. 08. At its nearest, the bank is 5 metres from the house. The track and bank are photographed in Fig. 13.

On the day a low wall or bank was observed running from the Divis road and on the north side of the river up to about 20 metres from the from the west end of the house site. It stops at this point, dog-legs across the river and goes on up a slope on the opposite (south) side of the river. This equates to the boundary between Divis and Hannahstown townlands and can be seen on the Ordnance Survey Maps of 1833 and 1857 (Figs 05 and 06).



Fig. 13. Track and bank to south of the house

Seven long lazy beds were observed over the river to the south of the site and can be seen in the foreground in the photograph Fig. 2. They are in Hannahstown townland and the Pattison Map (Fig.04) and subsequent land records show different ownership from the Reavy House site. It is therefore unlikely that these lazy beds were associated with the Reavy House site. More lazy beds were noted about 100 metres away and to the west of the site. These could have been associated with the Reavy House, or with the Divis Barn/Divis Lodge sites (UAS Survey No 41). A modern wire fence runs down the hill from east of the site and is marked on the site plan (Fig. 08).

#### 4.2.3 Surface finds

Some objects were collected from the site. These included:-

- A piece of flat iron, roughly rectangular, about 16cm by 9cm;
- Eleven pieces of slate, blue in colour and ranging from 2cm to 8cm across. These were found just outside and to the west of Room 3;
- Some fragments, 1cm or less, of possible red brick, also found to the west of Room 3;
- fifteen pieces of flint, found in the bed of the Big River, adjacent to the Reavy House site.

#### 4.3 Ownership and Occupancy

In 1767 the Reavy House was recorded on land belonging to Lord Donegall; see 2.3 and the James Crow Map (Fig. 03).

In 1823 William Hunter leased the townlands of Altigarron, Divis and Black Mountain from the Marquis of Donegall: see 2.3 and the Thomas Pattison Map (Fig. 04). The Reavy House is shown on the map but no occupancy is recorded. Occupancy is named and recorded for



other sites on William Hunter's land, but only for sites with "houses and land": see UAS Report No 25, Divis Farm. This suggests that perhaps only the house was sub-leased.

The 1833 and 1857 Ordnance Survey County Series Antrim maps both show houses on the site: see 2.3 and Figs 05 and 06. Interestingly, the 1833 map shows two houses on the Reavy House site but with no trace of the adjacent house shown on the 1857 or subsequent Ordnance Survey maps.

The next records are those of the Primary Valuation of Ireland (1848 – 1864), commonly known as The Griffith Valuation ([www.askaboutireland.ie](http://www.askaboutireland.ie)). The rating valuation for Divis townland was carried out in 1857 and a valuation map issued in 1861. The map shows the Reavy House at Site 1b. The "Immediate Lessor" is James Hunter, presumably an heir to William Hunter. The occupant of 1b is recorded as "George Reavy" and he is renting only the house, no land, from James Hunter at an Annual Valuation of £1 and 5 shillings (£1 and 25 pence).

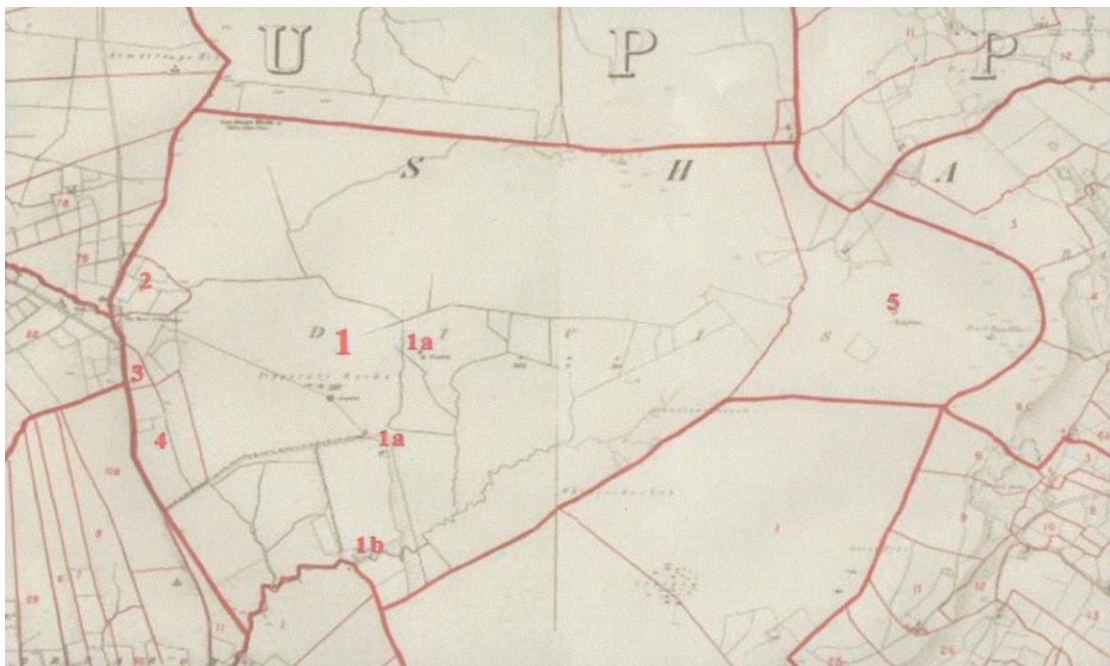


Fig. 14. Griffith Valuation Map for Divis 1861

From this time on the Valuations were revised on a regular basis and recorded in Valuation Revision Books. An examination of these books showed the following.

In 1876 Viscount Templeton took over Divis from James Hunter as "Immediate (or principal) Lessor". Site 1b continued to be occupied by George Reavy and he was now paying annual rent of £1 and 5 shillings for the house to Viscount Templeton. Public Records Office for Northern Ireland (PRONI) VAL/12/B/5/3A (1863 – 1880).

George Reavy continued to occupy the house, and pay annual rent of £1 and 5 shillings to Viscount Templeton, until 1899. After 1899 there is no recorded occupancy and presumably the house gradually fell into disrepair. PRONI VAL/12/B/5/3B (1881 – 1889), VAL/12/B/5/3C (1890 -1897) and VAL/12/B/5/3D (1897 – 1909).

#### 4.4 The Hatchet Murders

Local folk memory and history describe a triple murder which took place in an isolated farmhouse on Black Mountain. The murder weapon is described as an axe, or hatchet. William Cole is named as one of the victims and the survey house site is identified as a location for the crime. These sources also mention a “Hatchet Field” as a location and this would appear to be on the southern side of Black Mountain, and visible from Belfast. There is much speculation as to the other victims, motives etc. This information can be accessed at local history websites; <http://hannahstown.rushlightmagazine.com> and [www.hannahstownparish.com/](http://www.hannahstownparish.com/) Hannahstown History.

The murders did indeed take place and were reported in the Belfast News Letter of February 1753. The newspaper article was located in the Newspaper Library of the Belfast Central Library. The entry in the News Letter for the 20<sup>th</sup> February states:

“In the Night of the 14<sup>th</sup> of this Inst, February, the Dwelling House of Richard Cole, Drover, situate near the White Rock on the Black Mountain in the Parish of Belfast, was burglariously broke and entered, and the said Richard, a Woman and Child (being all the Persons in said House) were most barbarously and inhumanly murdered by some Person or Persons not yet discovered, who gave the said Richard, Woman and Child several mortal wounds on the Head with a Hatchet, of which they instantly died: and then robb’d and burnt said House: as appears by the Coroners Inquest held on the Bodies of the Deceased.”

Further articles were then entered in the Belfast News Letters of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1753, by a William Cole, offering a reward for information on the murders. William Cole was the son of Richard Cole. The articles state:

“Whereas in the Night of the 14<sup>th</sup> of February last the Dwelling House of Richard Cole, Drover, situate near the White Rock on the Black Mountain in the Parish of Belfast, was barbarously broke and entered, and the said Richard, a Woman and Child (being all the Persons in said House) were most barbarously and inhumanly murdered by some Person or Persons not yet discovered, who gave the said Richard, Woman and Child several mortal wounds with a Hatchet, of which they instantly died: and then robb’d and burnt said House: as appears by the Coroners Inquest held on the Bodies of the Deceased.

Now I William Cole, Son of the said Richard Cole, do promise a reward of Twenty Guineas, over and above what is allowed by a Act of Parliament, to any Person or Persons who shall within three months of the date hereof, discover, apprehend and convict the Person or Persons guilty of said horrid murder and Robbery: And I will give the like Reward to any one of the Accomplices (save only to the Person who actually committed the Murder) who shall first discover, apprehend and convict the others and use all due Interest to procure a Pardon for such first Discoverer.

Given under my hand at Belfast, this 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1753. WILLIAM COLE.”

A copy of the article is shown in Fig. 15.

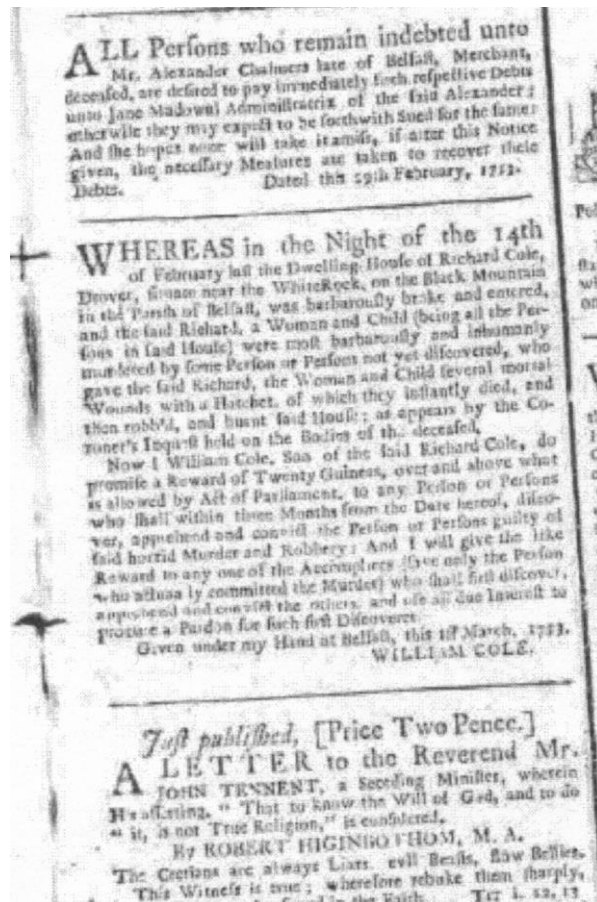


Fig. 15. Copy of article from Belfast News Letter, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1753

It is interesting to note that Richard Cole, not William Cole was the victim.

There is no direct evidence to link the Reavy House site with the murders. It is shown on the James Crow map of 1767 but these earliest maps name only the immediate or principal lessor. It is not until the Griffith 1857 survey that we get a named occupant for the house – George Reavy. An argument in favour of the Reavy House is that it was a substantial stone 2 – 3 room cottage and maybe wealthy enough to offer the Twenty Guinea reward – assuming that it was present as a stone house from the 1750's. It also had access to open mountain grazing on both Divis and Black Mountain – a suitable location for a drover?

However the newspaper description “situate near the White Rock on the Black Mountain” is more likely to suggest locations near to the White Rock Quarry. The quarry is shown on the 1833 Ordnance Survey map and the name continues to the present day in the Whiterock area of the Upper Springfield Road, Belfast. In addition the Hatchet Field appears to be located on the southern side of Black Mountain.

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations for further work

The Reavy House site is interesting in that the 1833 Ordnance Survey map shows two houses. A geo-physics survey or excavation might locate the other house and add to the archaeological record for the National Trust Divis and Black Mountain property.

## 6. Bibliography

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Welsh, H. 2013. *Survey of Divis Barn*, Survey Report No. 41, Ulster Archaeological Society.

McLaughlin, R. *A Vernacular Apocalypse Now*, Irish Archaeological Research, Issue 1, Oct 2011.

### PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD FORM

**Site: Reavy House, Divis**

**Date: 27 April 2013**

**Make and model of camera...Nikon D700 & Ricoh G600**

<b>Frame No</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Details</b>
DSC 6134	S	Site seen from South to North, Divis Lodge in background
DSC 6166	E	Survey Team on site, view looking west
DSC 6168	W	Site viewed from the west
RIMG 0009	S	View of stones inside Room 2
RIMG 0005	SW	Room 3 and south west corner of house
DSC 6131	SW	Track and bank to south of house