

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

ANTRIM AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



(Ezekiel Vance)
THE VANCE FAMILY

The Vance family played a crucial role in Antrim from the 18th to the 20th centuries. Ezekiel Vance was a Quaker yeoman who fought on the side of the crown forces against the United Irishmen in the Battle of Antrim in 1798. Vance was among outnumbered yeomen isolated at Antrim Castle. Reinforcements were on the outskirts of the town but the battle situation was unclear and they were wary of entering the fray. That changed when Vance took a woman's cloak, climbed to the top of the castle and waved it energetically, a signal that the loyalists still held the area. The supporting troops responded and Vance ran to meet them and led them into the town before they routed the rebels.

The Vance family was prominent in business and local administration in the 19th century with William Vance elected chairman of the Antrim Town Commissioners in 1888. His son Ezekiel was, like his namesake, involved in a military conflict but this was on a much larger scale. Ezekiel was a leading unionist and commanded an Antrim contingent of the Ulster Volunteer Force as they prepared to resist Home Rule for Ireland. However, the First World War put the Home Rule issue to one side and Vance became a Lieutenant in the 36th Ulster Division, in command of soldiers from the Antrim area in the 11th Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles. He was taken prisoner by the Germans after suffering a head injury during the opening day of the Battle of the Somme on 1st July 1916. Vance was initially reported killed but Captain Charles Craig, MP for South Antrim, who was also wounded and taken prisoner, wrote back home to say he saw the lieutenant in a military hospital and that he was alive and 'doing well.' This raised false hopes, however, as Ezekiel Vance died from his wounds on 15th July 1916.