



SLIEVE  
DONARD  
RESORT AND SPA

# Steam trains and golfing heaven, *where the Mourne's sweep down to the sea*

The story of  
Slieve Donard  
Resort and Spa



ADVERTISEMENT.

**Slieve Donard Hotel**  
NEWCASTLE  
(CO. DOWN)

55 MINUTES BY RAIL FROM BELFAST.

**THE FINEST HOTEL IN IRELAND.**

*Owned and Managed by the Belfast  
and County Down Railway Company.*

The Hotel contains over 120 bedrooms, with sitting-rooms and bedrooms en suite. A splendid entrance hall, with luxurious lounges, leads to the staircase and main corridors. The public rooms are all on the ground floor, and consist of drawing-room, grand coffee-room, reading- and writing-rooms, smoking-rooms, billiard-room, hair-dressing-rooms, etc. A very fine suite of baths for ladies

Lovingly restored to its original splendour, it is now one of the most famous hotels on the island of Ireland.

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One of many postcards sent back from Newcastle by fun-loving tourists

*Courtesy of Hastings Hotels*

## HOW IT ALL STARTED

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Up to the early 1800s, Newcastle was still a small fishing village. It was local landowners, the Annesley family, who masterminded its transformation into a thriving seaside resort.

Inspired by the growing popularity of spa towns throughout the British Isles, they built a spa near Donard Lodge, their magnificent house in the foothills of the Slieve Donard mountain.

Meanwhile, the sea front was developed to attract bathers, with many comfortable lodging houses springing up on the promenade. By the 1830s, Newcastle had become one of Ireland's most fashionable resorts.

## THE STEAM TRAIN EXCURSION

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It was the arrival of the railway that really brought in the crowds. In 1869, the Belfast and County Down Railway opened a line from Belfast to Newcastle. Visitors flooded in for weekend trips and summer holidays.

The railway company decided to build a hotel that would be worthy of its magnificent setting. At a then massive cost of £44,000, the Slieve Donard Hotel was opened in 1897.

'The most imposing structure of its kind in Ireland' it had 120 luxurious bedrooms over five floors. Idyllic views of the mountain and bay were available from all the public rooms and main bedrooms.

Amongst its attractions were freshwater, saltwater and Turkish baths and fireplaces in every room. Combined hotel and railway tickets enticed visitors from Belfast and further afield.

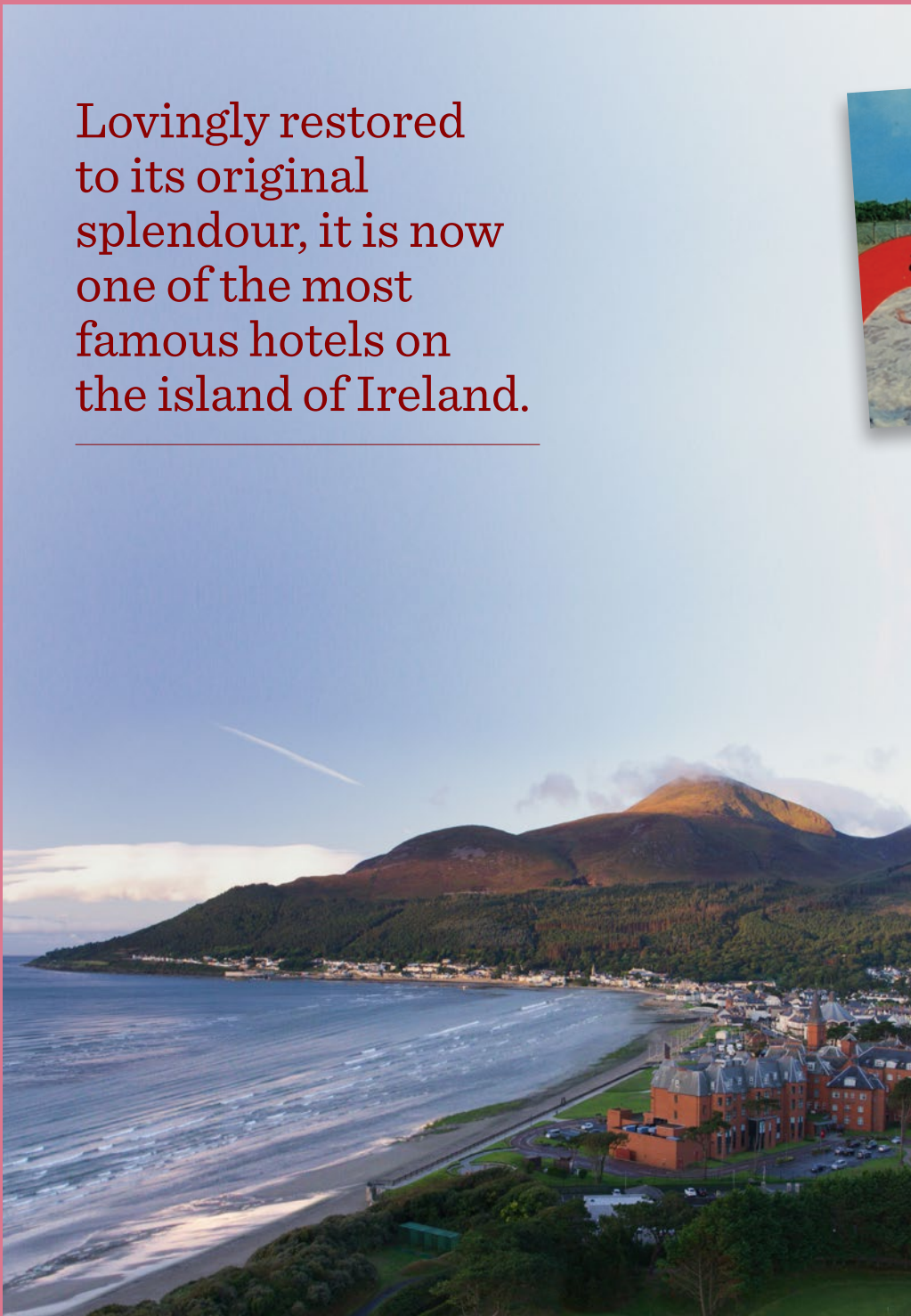
## ORIGINAL SPLENDOUR

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In May 1971 the late Sir William Hastings, founder of Hastings Hotels, bought the Slieve Donard from the Ulster Transport Authority.

While the advent of the Troubles had a devastating effect on the hospitality industry, Sir Billy's belief in the Slieve Donard never wavered and it survived through those dark days.

Lovingly restored to its original splendour, it is now one of the most famous hotels on the island of Ireland.



## Steam trains and golfing heaven, *where the Mourne sweep down to the sea*

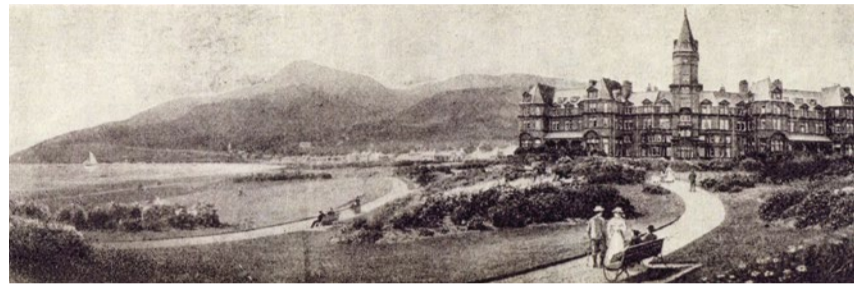


### LEFT

Boys and girls playing on the beach in front of the Slieve Donard hotel, c. 1900  
© National Museums Northern Ireland

### BELOW

A couple promenade in the beautiful grounds of the Slieve Donard.  
Courtesy of Hastings Hotels



### CHAPLIN'S LOST LOVE

Legendary comic actor and filmmaker Charlie Chaplin booked into the Slieve Donard on 21 September 1921. Having learned of the death of his first love, dancer Hetty Kelly who was from County Down, the screen idol was on a mission to trace her family.



*Charles Chaplin*

### ABOVE

Charlie Chaplin's signature from his visit to the hotel in 1921  
Courtesy of Hastings Hotels

### ABOVE LEFT

Charlie Chaplin, who wrote, directed and starred in 'The Circus', learned to walk a tightrope 40 feet in the air for this film  
Courtesy of Hastings Hotels

### LEFT

The inn on the resort named after the famous artist, composer and entertainer.  
Courtesy of Hastings Hotels

### FAR LEFT

Percy French as 'The Ballad Singer' c.1915. Photograph by Lafayette, Dublin  
Courtesy North Down Museum and Percy French Society

### BELOW

'This One for the Match' - Golfers at the Royal County Down Golf Club, c. 1900  
© National Museums Northern Ireland



### PERCY FRENCH

The Slieve Donard has welcomed monarchs, presidents, film stars and sporting legends. None left a greater mark than regular guest, songwriter Percy French.

He immortalised Newcastle in song as the place, *'where the mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea'*.

It was the arrival of the railway, in 1869, that really brought in the holiday makers.

### ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT

How it all started, the Belfast and County Down Railway. Every guest will walk under the crest at some point in their stay. Here's a clue: don't forget to look up!

Courtesy of [www.bcdr.org.uk](http://www.bcdr.org.uk)

GNRS locomotive No. 172 - named the 'Slieve Donard' - highlights the important role the railways played in the hotel's success.

© National Museums Northern Ireland

In the early 20th century no holiday was thought complete without sending a postcard.

Courtesy of Hastings Hotels

### WORLD'S FINEST GOLF COURSE

Hotel guests could (and still can) enjoy one of the world's finest golf courses right next door (or just a pitch shot away!). Opened in 1889, Royal County Down was a big hit – each Saturday a 'Golfer's Express' rattled through the County Down countryside from Belfast. The course has hosted many major tournaments, including the Walker Cup in 2007 and the Irish Open in 2015.





Rory McIlroy and Sir Van Morrison casually talking together in the Drawing Room of the Hotel in 2015

*Courtesy of Hastings Hotels*

## THE GUEST LIST

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The Slieve Donard has welcomed many special guests, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, King Leopold of Belgium, rock giant Sir Van Morrison, film stars Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones and Irish president Mary McAleese. Sporting guests have included golfing legends Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods and local hero Rory McIlroy.

## WHEN THE HOTEL WAS THE STAR

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The film 'Hotel Splendide', starring James Bond actor Daniel Craig, was filmed at the Slieve Donard. 'It had all the qualities we were looking for - a fairy tale element, a hint of gothic and was overwhelmingly big to dwarf the staff and guests,' said the film's producer, who had searched for a year for the right hotel.



The Slieve Donard during filming of 'Hotel Splendide', 2000

*Courtesy of Hastings Hotels*



Slieve Donard Resort and Spa  
Newcastle, Co Down, Northern Ireland

Tel: 0044 (0) 28 43721066 [www.hastingshotels.com](http://www.hastingshotels.com)