

Letter to the Editor

Badge – a rare Forestry term

Sir

I was a student of forestry in the early 1950s. As part of my practical year I was employed in 1953 as a forest worker in Ballygar State Forest. Ballygar Forest at that time was centered mainly in east Co. Galway but also stretched into Co Roscommon.

During my time there the operation generally known as ‘grass cleaning’ was referred to by the forest workers as ‘badging’, as in the exchange ‘Were you at the planting of this compartment?’ ‘No, but I was at the badging of it.’

Since that time I have not heard or read of this usage either among professional foresters or in dictionaries or published Forestry Terminologies.

In the Sixth (2007) edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘**Badge verb**³’ refers the reader to ‘**BAG verb**²’. There we find ‘**bag**/bag/verb² trans... Also **badge** [origin unknown]: Cut (wheat etc.) with a reaping hook’ I believe there can be little doubt that this is the same sense of the word that was in use in Ballygar Forest, where the implement used was a grass hook.

The date range of the first recorded use of this sense is given by the Dictionary as 1670-1699. It is not clear how an English word from the seventeenth century came to be in common use in Co Galway in the 1950s. It may be relevant that, according to an NUI Galway internet site the Kelly family had settled in Aghrane, the principal property of Ballygar Forest, also known as Castlekelly, in the late seventeenth century, and the estate continued to exist until 1910 when it was bought by the Department of Agriculture for forestry. Here we might note P.W. Joyce’s statement in his *English as we Speak it in Ireland* (1910 and reprinted) that ‘our people are very conservative in retaining old customs and forms of speech. Many words accordingly that are discarded as old-fashioned – or dead and gone – in England, are still flourishing – alive and well – in Ireland.’

I sent a note about this to *The Oxford English Dictionary*. They have informed me that the most recent example of this use of the word *badge* in their records is from a poem published in 1877 and that they would be interested in any further examples. I will be happy to send them any such examples which readers can send me, either through the medium of *Irish Forestry*, or directly to this address.

Yours sincerely

Niall OCarroll
Ballynakillew
Ballinrobe
Co. Mayo