

Forest Perspectives

Cultivation of Trees at Coole Park Extracts from Lady Gregory's *Diaries and Journals*

Selected and annotated by Niall OCarroll

The term 'cultivation of trees' is used since the practice at Coole¹ Park, the Gregory estate near Gort, Co. Galway, was not simply aimed at forestry as it is normally understood (i.e. the production of wood on a commercial basis), but it also involved some elements of arboricultural and aesthetic objectives.

According to the NUI Galway (2009) *Connacht Landed Estates Database* Coole Estate was bought by Robert Gregory (1727-1810) on his return from service with the East India Company, from the Martyns of Tullira², Co. Galway, about 1768.

Lady Gregory (1852-1932) was born Isabella Augusta Persse³ at Roxborough, near Loughrea, Co. Galway. In 1880 she married Sir William Gregory of Coole Park⁴, near Gort, who died in 1892.

As an undergraduate student of forestry in U.C.D. from 1951 to 1956, I spent part of my practical year (to gain outdoor practical experience of the work) as a forest worker (forest labourers we were called then) in Gort State Forest from September 1953 to April 1954. My first day was spent with the Forester-in-Charge, Tom Cox and the Divisional Inspector Neil Diver stocktaking tools in the shed which occupied the ruins of the shooting lodge in Chevy Chase. I also spent a day helping to mark a first thinning in a Japanese larch plantation, with the District Inspector Séamus MacMenamin who showed me how to pack the legs of my trousers with newspapers as protection against the rampant brambles. Much of my time was spent lifting by hand beech transplants in the nursery and cleaning broadleaf regrowth in other parts of the woods. I also worked in Garryland⁵ thinning the natural oaks, producing firewood, with manually operated two-man and sometimes four-man crosscut saws. In the process I was shown how to sharpen and set the teeth of a crosscut saw, a skill ("saw-doctoring") which I never found any subsequent occasion to use.

Already I had developed an interest in the Irish Literary Revival of the late 19th/early 20th centuries, so my appointment to Gort was, to me, entirely felicitous. Soon

¹ According to Flanagan, D. & L. (*Irish Place Names*, Dublin, 2002) 'Cúil' means a 'corner' or a 'nook'...it can easily be confused with 'cúil', 'hill'.

² It is of interest that Edward Martyn (1859-1924), co-founder of the Abbey Theatre with Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats, who died unmarried, was the last of the Martyn family of Tullira.

³ According to MacLysaght (*The Surnames of Ireland*, 1985) Persse, a variant of the name Pearse, is the name of a landed family established in Co. Galway in 1700, previously in Co. Kildare.

⁴ 1817-92. M.P. for Galway 1857-71, then Governor of Ceylon.

⁵ Joyce, P.W. in *Irish Names of Places*, Vol.III, 1913, on 'Garryland in Galway; here Garry is not garden but *Garbh; garbhlán*, rough land', a term which accurately describes the terrain.

after I began working in Coole the Head Labourer brought me to the Autograph Tree⁶ in the garden. We easily scaled the tall but flimsy netwire fence around it; he handed me a penknife and seemed surprised that I declined to add my initials to the many already there. (Since then the tree has been secured within sturdy railings.) While in Gort I visited W.B. Yeats's restored Tower House (Thoor Ballylee) and was disappointed to note its then derelict and dilapidated state – doorless, in use as a shelter for cattle, and one board already removed from the first upstairs floor. Yeats's commemorative wall plaque was sadly prophetic: '*And may these characters remain / When all is ruin once again*'. Later I bought the Lennox Robinson edition of *Lady Gregory's Journals 1916 – 1930*, then generally only available in Dublin second-hand bookshops. So I was pleased more recently to find that the complete Journals had been published with Lady Gregory's frequent references to the woods, which provided the main basis and impulse for this exercise.

All extracts from the journals have been transcribed as published. Additional material is enclosed in square brackets [], as have locations where irrelevant words have been omitted.

It might be noted that the entries relating to the woods occupy a relatively small space in a published version totaling 1,288 pages.

The Early Journals

The earliest published journals of Lady Gregory are in *Lady Gregory's Diaries, 1892-1902* (Pethica, 1996). Here she is already concerned about her son Robert's inheritance. On October 14, 1894 she writes 'I have been very much out and about, looking after woods, gates and fences. I am so anxious to keep the place in good repair for Robert.' And on April 8, 1895 'I hope to save the *home* – the house & woods at least for Robert'.

There are other brief mentions of the woods (in transcribing these extracts I have maintained her practice of punctuation by dash (—) and the use of the ampersand sign (&)).

8 April, 1895. 'Some of the larch in nutwood⁷ a good deal nibbled, but what was last planted, & that in Bull park⁸ not touched. They are anointed with Dickson's "preserver" which seems good – "Mike John" [Dooley] is installed as keeper – an addition to expense, but it is cheerful to see him about with dogs (Jap and Rover) and gun – and it was necessary to have some one look after the woods – He has detected 4 lads from Gort cutting down and carrying off trees from Inchy⁹, and summoned them last Saturday – but the summons server Mr. Glynn who does not want to quarrel with his neighbours did not appear to prove the service when wanted...and then Arch Deacon Daly informed Mike the case was adjourned - & then he went to take

⁶ A copper beech bearing the carved initials of literary guests of Lady Gregory.

⁷ According to Smythe (1983) and the Ordnance Survey map the nutwood is a large wood north of the house.

⁸ Immediately south of the stable block (Smythe, 1983).

⁹ A large wooded area south of the house and beside Coole Lough (Smythe, 1983).

a cup of tea with Mary – and while there a policeman called him back – and said it was coming on – however it was finally adjourned for a fortnight, no one in this country being in a hurry!

31 January, 1896. Have planted about 1400 trees, in nutwood & clump in “45 acres” - Larch [*Larix decidua*], spruce [*Picea abies*] – silver [*Abies alba*] – scotch [*Pinus sylvestris*] – & some evergreen oaks & new lilacs in nutwood – & Frank¹⁰ has been over today & advised me to get 1000 birch, as a man has been over from England buying them at L. Cutra for clog soles – anyway they are very silvery, showing through dark foliage.

February 13, 1896. Nothing new – planted 1000 birch in nut wood - & some dog wood [*Cornus* spp.] & sallys [*Salix* spp.] elsewhere.

15 February, 1896. Church - & went to see old Farrell & engaged him to cut ivy from the trees “by contract” that he can choose his own days and hours.

19 February, 1896. A larch coming out in the woods – Farrell cutting ivy merrily.

21 February, 1896. In the afternoon got Marty & 93 ash saplings he had dug up, & proceeded with him & Cahel to plant them along the walls – at back of Kiltartan chapel - & other wall of park – if they succeed, it will have been a good days work – towards Robert’s firing [firewood] in the future.

30 January, 1898. Arranging tree planting – R. and I having marked 30 spruce for the people, & to leave gaps for the shooting, I am ordering 300 spruce, 300 larch, 100 silvers to take their place.

10 February, 1896. I am stronger in body from the rest, but growing dulled in mind so that it is an effort to write an Irish exercise¹¹ or a letter – however I have finished & sent off a paper on “Tree Planting”¹² to the Irish Homestead.

9 April, 1898. Fine dry weather – I went round the first day with Mike to mark trees – dead and dying ash for the people – firing being very scarce.

¹⁰ Francis Persse, Lady Gregory’s brother.

¹¹ Lady Gregory made several attempts to learn the Irish language.

¹² Reprinted in *Irish Forestry* 33: 94-98.

12 May, 1901. The little larch trees I last planted are doing well everywhere, but the silvers and spruce have withered up in the cold winds.

16 March, 1903. The place sadly changed by storms of February 26¹³ – the accounts of which had disturbed me in London. 10 lime trees down between house and stables - & the big lime to the left (greatest loss of all) & the big evergreen oak in front lawn - & some parts of the wood laid flat.

The main Journals

Lady Gregory's principal Journals (Gregory 1978, 1987) were begun primarily to record the progress of her attempts to achieve the return of the Lane picture collection¹⁴ from London to Dublin. But she also recorded matters to do with the Abbey Theatre, of which she was founder director; Coole Estate and day-to-day trivialities of life and family. She had a particular interest in the Coole woods which she wished to see maintained and improved to be ultimately inherited by her grandchildren. Although by now the ownership had passed to her daughter-in-law it was gradually realized that the resources were not available to maintain the house and estate so the woods were sold to the Forestry Division¹⁵ of the Department of Lands and incorporated into Gort State Forest, Co. Galway. The Coole estate portion of Gort Forest also included the adjoining woods at Garryland.

I have abstracted from the published journals all the references to the Coole woods. The footnotes derive from four sources: the Murphy edition of the Journals (Gregory, 1978, 1987), other published sources, information from Colin Smythe and my personal memories.

Journals Vol. 1. (2 refs.)

24 February, 1923. Yesterday I had a nice afternoon, thinning¹⁶ the plantation in Park-na-Laoi¹⁷.

12 March, 1923. Some hope of peace moves coming to success¹⁸.

¹³ Other records suggest 22 February. The widespread fellings caused by this storm led to an immigration of sawmills which then continued to demand further supplies, thereby continuing the serious depletion of Irish woodlands. It was locally named 'the night of the big wind' although not as severe as the original storm of that name on 6/7 January 1839.

¹⁴ Sir Hugh Lane (1875-1915), her nephew, son of Lady Gregory's sister Adelaide, a picture dealer and collector, promised to leave his priceless collection to Dublin but changed his mind when Dublin Corporation failed to provide a suitable gallery and left it to the London National Gallery. After his death on his return to London on the *Lusitania* in 1915, an unsigned codicil to his will, restoring the collection to Dublin was found but its legality was rejected by the London authorities. A compromise was reached in 1959 by which the collection was divided in two and the halves alternated between Dublin and London for alternating five-year periods.

¹⁵ Sometimes referred to as the Forestry Commission, even by people who should know better. The Forestry Commission ceased to function in Ireland when independence was achieved in 1922.

¹⁶ Colin Smythe (publisher of the Journals and expert on all aspects of Coole and its family), informed me that Lady Gregory did a lot of the work herself, not merely overseeing it.

¹⁷ A narrow strip of woodland southwest of the house and beside the Coole River (Smythe 1983).

¹⁸ A reference to the Civil War which came to an end in May 1923.

I have been a good deal in the woods freeing the little trees in Park-na-tarav¹⁹, and find my love for the wood work has come back as strong as ever, I so hope to save all the woods for the children.

Journals Vol. 2. (66 refs.)

20 January, 1926. Mr. Forbes²⁰ of Forestry Department came yesterday to look at the woods. M[argaret]²¹ having offered them and remaining land for sale. He seemed pleased and will recommend the purchase, but would not think of buying the house. I shall be glad if the woods are kept up and improved if they have to go to strangers. And he thought my young plantings very well grown and flourishing. I was afraid they wanted thinning &c, not having been able to look after them of late²².

5 April, 1926. Once [while on tour with the Abbey Players in the U.S.A.] Mr. Schuman and his daughter were to take me to Thoreau's "Walden"²³ and she [Mrs. Jack Gardner] proposed coming. A delightful day, the drive, the woods; at lunch I was to have my first meeting with green corn on the stalk.

2 February, 1927. This afternoon to see Keller²⁴ about the sale of Coole. He had been with Hogan²⁵, and M[argaret] will be disappointed, for the Forestry Dept. (Forbes) will only give £4000, that is, Woods £1908, Land £1600, House £500. Hogan thought it would be raised to £6000 and had proposed this, but Forbes turned it down. But he will see Forbes and press for an increase.

10 March, 1927. Yesterday a telegram to Margaret from Keller saying full price "that is £5000" will be given her for Coole "without conditions". So Coole is gone. But I hope to stay for the summer, it will be a home for the children..

My mind is relieved that the sale has been arranged, for the Forestry people will take care of the woods – yet my heart is a bit sore.

¹⁹ Pairc-na-Tarav (the bull field). An elongated truncated triangular-shaped wood immediately south of the stable-yard (Smythe, 1983).

²⁰ A.C. Forbes, (1865-1950) was appointed Forestry Adviser to the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, Dublin, in 1906. He became Director of Forestry after independence.

²¹ Widow of Lady Gregory's son Robert, killed in Italy in 1918, while on air patrol (see W.B. Yeats's poem 'An Irish Airman Foresees His death'). Margaret was therefore the legal owner of Coole. (It appears that Robert may not have been the paragon suggested by Yeats. Pethica (2009) has revealed records showing that he (a married father of three) conducted an extramarital affair with a young married painter in London in 1914, causing Lady Gregory to refer to him as 'a cad'.)

²² Lady Gregory was aged nearly 74 years at this time.

²³ Henry David Thoreau: Walden; or, Life in the Woods (1854). Describes the building and lone occupation of a hut in the woods at Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts.

²⁴ A solicitor.

²⁵ Patrick Hogan, T.D. for Co. Galway, Minister for Agriculture 1922-32.

I have written to ask Hogan if he will have the avenue attended to before the children come back for Easter. (30 April 1928. And this had never been done in spite of promises from the Forestry Dept. until the *end* of the Easter holidays *this* year!)

12 May, 1927. 82 Merrion Square²⁶. Then to Keller to tell him Forbes, who had come to see me, had said they would take over the place in about two months, and asked if I would consent to be “Caretaker” – apparently instead of “tenant”, paying £50 per annum for the house. But it was a hurried visit and I am rather vague, but he will come back for a day or two soon. I asked if he would take Mike²⁷ on to look after the woods, and he seems inclined to – that would be a great comfort. I asked if he would sell any of the land and he said “No, we have not power to part with it²⁸”. That is an ease, as others, like Curly, may come looking for it.

11 July, 1927. It was as well I went up [to Dublin], as Keller ’phoned to ask where I was, at Coole or elsewhere, and I went to him and he had Forbes in and we talked about taking over the house and garden, and made a provisional agreement, I to take house etc. and some fields for cows at £100 (it came to more (£117) later). Not a great saving I’m afraid though they must pay rates and taxes. But at any cost I will keep it as long as it can be a happy home for the children. Catherine²⁹ very happy here anyhow.

27 July, 1927. Forbes here yesterday about the land. We agreed to terms we had talked over except that he won’t keep the pump in order. They are not going to cut trees at present, and that is a comfort, timber being at a low price, but will make a nursery at once in comfrey field.

21 August, 1927. And next morning, on top of these guests, came three Land and Forestry Officials to take over woods and land. But they couldn’t do it because of thirty acres Margaret had sold to Raftery, from Lake Farm to lake, and this had not been marked on the map as sold. Forbes was indignant; Reed (Land) more gracious, Anderson (sub Land) silent. But it will all come right though causing delay.

²⁶ W.B. Yeats’s address.

²⁷ Michael Dooley, (1853-1923), Lady Gregory’s land steward who lived in the Gate Lodge at Coole (Saddlemeyer, 2011).

²⁸ Authority to sell state forest land was provided for only with the passing of the Forestry Act, 1988 and the establishment of Coillte Teoranta, The Irish Forestry Board Limited.

²⁹ Grand-daughter. Later Mrs Robert Kennedy (1913-2000) (Saddlemeyer, 2011).

15 October, 1927. Two Land Commissioners here today, Crozier³⁰ and O'Beirne³¹ (No they are on the Forestry staff). They asked for the sawpit field³² instead of the comfrey field for a nursery as it is (as I know) a much better one so I gave it up willingly as I am glad to think they will begin their work so soon. They are selling the disputed land to Malachi Quinn. I wish this had been done long ago but he was hard to deal with, urging for arbitration and so violent in temper. But he had trouble enough to give his brain a twist and I am glad there will be peace now.

20 October, 1927. Today Mr. Reed of the Land Commission and Mr. Donovan³³ of the Forestry Department came and formally took over Coole, took possession. It no longer belongs to anyone of our family or name. I am thankful to have been able to keep back a sale for these years past, giving it into the hands of the Forestry people makes the maintenance and improvement of the woods secure, and will give employment and be for the good and dignity of the country. As to the house, I will stay and keep it as the children's home as long as I keep strength enough and can earn money enough.

21 October, 1927. I told Mike I was afraid he was not being put in charge of the woods as Forbes had encouraged me to think (but had said nothing of in his letters). Poor Mike in his stupid sullen way said "What matter"; and then "I'll get a job in some other place! I've written to Forbes today about him, and meanwhile he is to look after the woods till the Forestry send someone in.

31 October, 1927. Waiting now to see Forbes chiefly on behalf of Mike John.

1 November, 1927. Forbes came in yesterday just as I had written this. The Inspector he says will be at Coole next week, O'Beirne. He can't get a house at present. I begged him to recommend Mike; he wouldn't promise, said he had not the power, but I think he will, he looked kind.

7 November, 1927. Today I have signed the Forestry agreement; rather nervous, but hope it may work out well.

³⁰ Director of Forestry, 1931-33.

³¹ Michael O'Beirne, A.R.C.Sc.I (Forestry) 1914. District Inspector, Gort. Later Superintendent, Avondale Forestry School. Honorary Member 1950. In the year 1941/42 District Headquarters were transferred from Gort to Galway City.

³² A roughly square field approximately south by west of Coole house (Smythe, 1983). In 1953-4 the forest nursery was located in the northern half of the field identified as 'the back lawn' by Smythe (1983).

³³ Timothy (O) Donovan, b. 1882. Forester in Charge Ballygar Forest 1920-34 from where 'he advised on private planting in the west'. Honorary Member 1966.

10 November, 1927. M. had a letter from Richard³⁴ choosing Coole for the holidays, saying he was beginning to wish to see a tree again. I am worried by delay in forestry overseer coming, the avenue in holes and they have agreed to keep it in repair.

14 November, 1927. O'Beirne who is appointed Inspector of this place called on Saturday. I sent Mike round with him and hope he may engage him. I bought a fallen oak for firing³⁵ for five shillings a new departure! though my planting in the woods came to many hundreds. My anxiety now is to get the avenue mended before the holidays.

1 December, 1927. O'Beirne, the Inspector here this morning, is having the sawpit field ploughed for spring planting and stones broken³⁶ to mend the poor avenue. And my men are helping this, bringing stones to help Donohue to build the wall and so we shall get rid of gates.

O'Beirne looked in yesterday, and has taken the avenue in hand. A comfort seeing that done and already some employment given, to three or four stonebreakers.

3 June, 1928. I stayed indoors yesterday afternoon [...] that I might not embarrass the many groups of boys and girls, young men and maidens, who were walking about passing the house to the woods and lake, by appearing as if to remind them of my ownership—(only by rent now). It is an ease to my mind that this is so, under the Foresters. They have the responsibility for the preservation of the woods. Owners are in the position of Nietzsche's Commander— "he who commandeth taketh the burden of them that obey"³⁷

13 June, 1928. A young Forester, Mr. Gaynor,³⁸ came to visit the woods, but the rain kept him in. I gave him Evelyn's *Silva*³⁹ to look at, and after a while went into the Library and had a long talk with him.

³⁴ Lady Gregory's grandson, 1909-1981.

³⁵ I was told by workers in Coole that whenever an apple tree was cut on the estate the wood was sent to the drawing room where it emitted a pleasant scent while burning.

³⁶ In the 1950s in Gort Forest a common form of wet-weather work was the manual breaking of stones, with wire gauze eye-protection goggles, in the old barn, then derelict, used for tenant dances in Lady Gregory's time, latterly restored as an audio-visual room.

³⁷ Quotation from Friedrich Nietzsche, German Philosopher, 1844-1900.

³⁸ Daniel J. Gaynor, 1892-1944. Appointed Forester 1923. His obituary notice (*Irish Forestry* 2: 41) records 'He spent his holidays in an adventurous manner and had travelled a good deal outside Eire, which was probably one reason for his capacity for interesting conversation.'

³⁹ J.E. Esq.; (John Evelyn). *Sylva, or a Discourse of Forest-Trees, and the Propagation of Timber in His Majesties Dominions*. London, 1664. Colin Smythe informs me that a 'sale of the books at Coole' in 1972 included the 1786 edition, bought by Quaritch, London for £70. (I bought a first edition of Samuel Hayes's *A Practical Treatise...* from Quaritch in 2001, for rather more than £70.)

For a description of a first edition copy of *Sylva* with extracts see *Irish Forestry* 31: 171-178.

He has a lovely time at Mount Shannon, his present abode, but has an interest in folk lore, believing (as I do) that even the superstitions have some foundation, perhaps outside the world, and we got on to the foundations of Christianity — “I often wonder whether I would have believed had I lived then that Christ was the Son of God” — and he wondered that the world had been left so long without such a spiritual influence. I read him some scraps of Plato as “Now shall we consider in what way they are to be brought from darkness to light, as some are said to have ascended from the world below to the gods?... The process is not the turning over of an oyster shell but the turning round of a soul passing from a day which is little better than night to the true day of being”.

14 June, 1928. Young Gaynor came from his woods inspection, will plant a part of the nut wood between two of my plantings, just what I had intended to do next had I been able to go on with planting, and I’m glad. Also (beginning with Raheen field) pond field. And will not cut any heavy timber at present, and will always spare the fine or exotic trees. All this a happiness, the woods will take on a new vigour & not fade away. He has no books at Mount Shannon & we chose some for him to borrow, *The Downfall* (Zola), and Lord Jim [Joseph Conrad], and Kropotkin’s *Memoirs*, and the *Blazed Trail* [Stewart Edward White, 1902⁴⁰], one of those novels recommended by Roosevelt and given me by the publisher – a novel of U.S.A. forestry; and Erskine Childers’ *Riddle of the Sands*.

23 June, 1928. A beautiful drive yesterday, [in Co. Wicklow] through hills, with views of distant mountains [...] and the Foresters have been working, we passed many plantations.

18 July, 1928. Young Gaynor the forester came and Richard motored him to the train. He is enjoying *Riddle of the Sands* and had like the *Blazed Trail*, wondered at it being so well written (on his own subject forestry) a storybook. I told him it was Roosevelt⁴¹ who had recommended it, and the publisher who had heard him do so and sent it and the other books he had recommended, to me next day.

4 August, 1928. The basket maker said to me a while ago “The country is withered out of trees”. I am glad our Government is preparing legislation against cutting⁴².

⁴⁰ *The Blazed Trail*, by Stewart Edward White tells the story of pioneer lumbermen in the northern woods of Michigan.

⁴¹ Theodore Roosevelt, 1858-1919 26th President of U.S.A.

⁴² The control of felling was first introduced in the Forestry Act, 1928.

Michael [Shaw-Taylor] motored me back here. Is vague as to what he will do, [...] will sell Garryland⁴³ to the Forestry Department for £1000, and probably sell land and woods at Castle Taylor but will buy back house and surroundings.

4 November, 1928. Lyon⁴⁴ has tempered his Theatre MSS by sending as he had promised a new book on Forestry, *Trodden Gold*⁴⁵. I like it so far; the writer loves trees.

16 November, 1928. This evening I go on reading *Trodden Gold* (a cold giving my conscience an excuse for not going to the Abbey.) The facts he gives about our poverty of trees in Ireland are heart-rending – to me – (I think of Chevy Chase⁴⁶, planted by my grandfather or my father in his early days, all but all sold and cut now I think). (19 April, 1929. the Forestry Department have, I’m delighted to know – just bought it). For myself I did my utmost, from the time I began to earn £50 or so in the year, I spent it in planting little patches a few acres, at a time, in the poorer parts of our woods. Robert was glad though I was given the usual warning by others that the country was being sent to the bad by Nationalists, Land Leaguers, Sinn Feiners. And although I had to stop when I took over all the expenses of Coole, my plantings make a good show for their age. And I am happy, very happy, that the Forestry Department has become the owner – “God prosper it”. This *Trodden Gold* is a fine book touching on other things besides this:- “Napoleon...like all outstanding personalities in history did not believe in committees, only in men” [...] “Sin is energy developed in the wrong direction” – the right one of course is Forestry!

7 December, 1928. I went out after 12 o’c to the Pairc-na-Tarav, to try for primroses in bud or blow to bring in before frost comes; found a group of men at their meal under a tree, and Mike, who said they have begun clearing the upper part for replanting. It was rather a sudden shock seeing this invasion of the woods’ solitude, but Mike says they will not meddle with the thick cover. And I was glad to think that “unemployed” men, ex soldiers most of them – though O’Beirne grumbles at their inefficiency – are earning their 27/- a week. I told Mike what I had come for, primroses, and he said “Ah, there’s none, the frost made away with them”. But at that moment moving but a step – there was a plant in flower almost under my feet! I brought it in and some others, to finish its flowering indoors.

⁴³ According to the NUI Landed Estates Database (2009), a Walter Shawe-Taylor was granted almost 1,000 acres in the Barony of Kiltartan in 1667. Garryland, adjacent to the Coole Estate formed part of Gort State Forest in the 1950s.

⁴⁴ W.G. Lyon, publisher, The Talbot Press, Dublin.

⁴⁵ *Trodden Gold* by John Mackay (Talbot Press, 1928) author of *Forestry in Ireland* (1934) and *The Rape of Ireland* (1940).

⁴⁶ In 1953 Chevy Chase was an outlying property of Gort State Forest. It had previously formed part of the Persse (Roxborough) estate.



Figure 1: *Chevy Chase Lodge. Photograph belonged to Lady Gregory, given to Colin Smythe by Major Richard Gregory. Photographer and date unknown. Reproduced by permission of Colin Smythe.*

12 December, 1928. I had been to see Mrs. O’Beirne, in the old Steward’s House. Donohue had rebuilt it badly and they are not very comfortable, but she keeps everything tidy and seems a good manager, had brought her two dozen fowl with her. She had been frightened one day by Donohue (who has “gone astray in his mind”) coming to the door and demanding entrance, saying it was his house – J.D. supplemented the account – “I was passing myself and I heard him and I came and asked him what did he want and he gave me no answer no more than if he was up in Dublin. But by the mercy of God, Mr. O’Beirne had not his dinner finished and came out, and when Donohue saw him and could not get in he lighted his pipe and went away”.

13 December, 1928. I have been this afternoon to Pairc-na-Tarav where the foresters are cutting the ragged useless trees to make a new planting – a great joy to me to see the work beginning again that I had been forced to abandon. And they will plant great spaces, in comparison with my few acres at a time. This will be an interest henceforth. But Jim Mulloo was hurt yesterday by the fall of an oak limb he was cutting but no bone broken.

29 December, 1928. Guy⁴⁷ wrote such nice kind words on a card with photograph of the house (he and M. spent Xmas there) “This simple little home of Margaret and hers is always ready for yours. It will always welcome you”. So kind, but there is no home for me but Coole, and if I break down, a nursing home.

⁴⁷ Guy Gough (1887-1959), Lough Cutra, married Robert’s widow Margaret on 8 September 1928.

18 January, 1929. I heard a good many shots yesterday evening as I went to the lake. [...] And I was happy that Coole is giving joy again to youngsters of today. [...] If I had been able to go on with my little plantings the coverts would be fine as ever now. But that stopped in 1918 when expenses began to fall more heavily on me. I have brought the house safely through but the enrichment⁴⁸ of the woods had to be abandoned.

23 January, 1929. Mr. O'Beirne looked in at breakfast time on his way to the woods. I had been to look at the clearing in Pairc-na-Tarav a day or two ago – such a joy to see the work going on *en gros*, [on a large scale] that I had done *en Detail* [minutely] They have cleared twenty acres there and are about to plant it, as well as Raheen strip and Pond Field, - chiefly with larch [and] spruce, a little beech which he says helps to protect the larch. They will be regularly employing about twenty men, more while planting is going on. Such a help to the neighbourhood, as well as keeping up the tradition of the “Seven Woods”⁴⁹!

5 February, 1929. [While undergoing an operation for breast cancer under local anaesthetic] I tried to keep my mind on the new plantings in the woods, and the happiness the little trees must feel when their roots, dry and packed together from their journey, are spread out in that soft damp leafmould where the clearings have been made, and their branches loosened from the packing. But when a second little avenue of stabs began being made by kind wise Slattery⁵⁰ on the old scar, it was rather the spade that came to mind.

8 March, 1929. I had sent to ask Mr. O'Beirne to come and see me, I wanted to know what wages he is giving the men employed in the woods as I would raise Peter and Paddy to the same, they both being vigorous enough for that work. And before he came I was told there is a strike on, he gives 25/- per week, and last week they demanded 27/- (their hours have been lengthened – to 7 o'clock) which he refused so they have struck, have not come since except one or two, who with Mike and O'Beirne himself have been going on as best they can, but there are thousands of little trees waiting to be put in and these cannot be handled in time. J. says the strike was got up by a few “bad lads”. Coen who

⁴⁸ The names of ‘the seven woods of Coole’ (in anglicised form) are listed by W.B. Yeats in his poem of September 1900 in *The Shadowy Waters*. They are: Shan-walla, Kyle-dortha, Kyle-na-no, Pairc-na-lee, Pairc-na-carraig, Pairc-na-tarav and Inchy wood (‘Incha’ on Ordnance Survey maps).’

⁴⁹ Enrichment planting (as a current official FAO forestry term) ‘aims to increase the number of desirable plants in the forest with minimal disturbance to the forest ecosystem.’

⁵⁰ Dr R.V. Slattery, a surgeon at the Richmond Hospital Dublin.

has just come to demand the rates on the little Kincorda field (which is not mine or used by me) says the “lads” who got up the strike are a bad lot, Gort men. Laurence Dooley and others are almost weeping at losing their pay but are afraid to go on. A man at Ballyturin having been fired at and wounded the other day because he went on carting, whereas the strikers there wanted carting put off till they had finished their own work, O’Beirne has now given 27/- with an hour’s more work. I have raised mine to 25/- (easier work) and J.D. 27/- and they seem happy.

12 March, 1929. The strike is over, the men at work again. I’ve been over to Pairc-na-Tarav; the strike over, groups of lads at work, some planting, some clearing rubbish, to a bonfire, and carts coming for the fuel that is still a godsend. And now six or eight young men on their bicycles whirling past the front door, the breakfast room windows. I called out to them that were these still the disturbed times I should take them for the advance guard of an army.

14 March, 1929. I went to see the planting, now in the pond field, and met a young fellow, a Regan, going home from the work. He looked sad and told me he was setting out next day for Australia – Melbourne. His brother who went there two years ago has found work there and married and sent for him. They are a well-to-do family, living now in Ballinamantane⁵¹, some in the old house. But there seems to be little for these well-to-do families’ sons to do, they are above the class of day labourers and there does not seem much else open for which they are fitted. This forestry is the best help yet.

30 March, 1929. I went to see the nursery being planted in sawpit field – there and elsewhere 33 men employed today. And my own three – and two of Raftery’s who are whitening the face of the house. Splendid to see so many at work.

12 April, 1929. I finished reading *Maelcho*⁵² last night. No, it is not a fine book. The whole later part of the book is of horrors, of the terrible cruelty of the English soldiers, their extermination of the people – and of the trees – the forests.

16 April, 1929. That [grandson Richard and friends riding donkeys], varied by occasional ferretting [*sic*] for rabbits that wouldn’t come out

⁵¹ According to Saddlemeyer (2011), Ballinamantan (sic) was a dower house opposite the road into Coole. Neither form of the name appears in the Townland Index (Census of Ireland, 1851). Joyce (1869) in his index of root words lists Mantan, Mantach, a toothless person.

⁵² A novel by Emily Lawless (1845-1913).

(the Foresters wanting to abolish these enemies of the young trees) or if they did bobbed down again.

18 April, 1929. And after lunch they came out to see out to see the planting of the Forestry nursery – such a happy sight – all those lads at work, one singing, and the tiny trees being put in their lines.

25 April [1929]. A nice letter from Lord Carson⁵³ approving of delay [in demand for return of the Lane pictures] till after the elections; promising continued help, interested about the planting “which I always thought was a thing to be taken up seriously in Ireland. It is very far advanced on the Duke of Abercorn’s estate [Baronscourt, Co. Tyrone.] in the North of Ireland – there it has been carried out by the Government on a very large scale. I think they pay a small rent for the land to the Duke⁵⁴ I would like to think of my some day shooting woodcock, especially in Galway”.

2 May, 1929. Yesterday I had the O’Beirne children and their mother for the afternoon, Mr. O’B. to tea. He was much delighted, looking through Evelyn’s *Silva*, spent his time after tea devouring it.

6 May, 1929. The beauty, the romance of our Seven Woods, the mysteries of our ebbing and flowing lake are dear to me, have been well loved, and are now in hands that will care and tend them it is likely forever.

3 June, 1929. I came back in a hurry from Dublin to settle the great pump question – the old one worn out and on strike – the Galway plumber after a day at it sending an immense list of its requirements – and wanting much help from my men. Millington⁵⁵ in Dublin using his knowledge as editor of the *Farmers Gazette* to recommend a new oil one. The Vice-regal car taking me to Government Buildings to appeal to Forbes as head of Forestry for as I said that Department will have a longer life than mine. His rejection of the idea, ending in a promise to send their inspector. Today the arrival of the inspector – with Forbes himself! Inspection of pump, an oil one decided on; cost £60. My offer of £20 towards it coldly received but I think accepted while they had lunch. A great relief; I had shivered at the thought of dealing with the plumber – underground!

⁵³ Edward Carson (1854–1935). A native of Dublin. Leader of the Irish Unionists in Parliament (1910), successful in securing the exclusion of the northern six counties from the Irish Free State.

⁵⁴ An area of 2,918 acres was acquired by the Northern Ireland Forest Service in November 1920 at an annual rent of 4 shillings (£0.20 sterling) (Kilpatrick, 1987).

⁵⁵ Business Manager, the Abbey Theatre.

31 December, 1929. I used to think and say [...] that I should like to live to see Richard come of age. And now this has come. [...] The coming of age is not now the coming into ownership of his property and home – that were owned by the generations before him. And although I am thankful it is in such hands as those of the Forestry Department there is a little sadness in this.

8 January, 1930. Mr. Robinson, Department of Forestry Engineer – who would not believe when he was choosing a site for the pump that the lake ever rises so high as he was told, came for the night, and this morning inspected it – had to be rowed round it in a boat!

26 January, 1930. A peaceful day except that the grass, on the edge of the drive round the yard is being ploughed up by Mr. O’Beirne’s car and I must remonstrate.

28 January, 1930. Such a warm day. I picked a little bunch of violets in the garden. The O’Beirnes here to tea. The little ones happy in the playroom with rocking horse &c and gramophone. And happily I had a box of parlour fireworks for them after tea – a novelty.

28 February, 1930. I explored some of the new plantings in the woods – primroses coming out but the larch has not yet budded. Taking “Old Greeny” - my favourite coat, long condemned by the children, I laid it over the barbed wire before crossing and so came through unscathed.

But my Remington [typewriter] struck work, and at last O’Beirne, having failed to set in going, took it to the Rectory for Mr. Warren’s (successful) ministrations.

1 March, 1930. And Huntington⁵⁶ having made some slight alteration in proposed codicil making him literary executor [to Lady Gregory’s estate] I seized Mr. O’Beirne who called re typewriter, and Ellen, to witness my signature.

13 June, 1930. And yesterday, left alone O’Beirne motored me to Chevy [Chase] for the day. He is looking after a great deal of the work there, preparation for planting. The poor house a ruin⁵⁷, the thatched roof fell in some time ago. All lovely still, hill and bog and the trees that escaped the cutters in the war years. The O’Beirnes went to inspect the gangs at work. I sat by the river, where our boy parties used to fish. And

⁵⁶ Publisher, Putnam & Co. Publisher of the abbreviated version of the Journals, edited by Lennox Robinson, 1946.

⁵⁷ In the 1950s the ruin was in use as a tool house for the Chevy Chase property of Gort Forest. A photograph of Chevy Chase hunting lodge, about 1890, appears in Pethica 1996.

I looked at what might have been a scene from the Canada storybooks. The bridge had fallen, only the great pier in the centre of the river left standing. And presently a lad led a horse to the water and fastened a log, the whole trunk of a tree, to it with a chain, and then rode it through the river to my side, and unchained the log, and went back for another, and so on. I sat for a long time looking at this work and listening to the murmur of the river. A lad I spoke to said he was a grandson of Jimmy Burke who was caretaker when we children used to come and stay at Chevy. They are all delighted at the work that is being given. Then, 12 o'clock they stopped to light a fire and sat near it for their meal. And I went back to the car and when the O'Beirnes came we opened my basket and had lunch. There were masses of rhododendrons in bloom.

13 July, 1930. Too wet for church and I am not sorry – for I am very tired having had the O'Beirnes for raspberry picking yesterday afternoon.

[...]

But one thing has cheered me. I asked O'Beirne if the Forestry Department would be likely to use this house should it be given up after my death. He thinks they would use it. They are extending their work – Slieve Echtge [Aughty], Woodford, Connemara – And this place so near the railway station would be quite a good centre. He asked if someone of my family would not keep it, but I said that is very unlikely. [...] I dreaded the likelihood of this home, where so many I have cared for have lived and been happy, falling to ruin, unroofed, unsightly. But as a hive of industry, the woods increasing and flourishing, there would be no degradation, it would have the dignity of a centre of the Forestry that will hold pride as well as future profit for the countryside.⁵⁸

Parnell's Avondale is already used in this way, for Wicklow. And if at night I am still "plagued with aches", this will be a tranquillising thought.

21 January, 1931. I had the best of it for he⁵⁹ & I had a good talk on re-forestation Ireland. He has had a report – a very strong one written on its necessity, he had given me to read. And next day as I left, to take the car to the Talbot Press the first time in green! And went in – asked if Mr. Lyon was there. "He is, and there is no one he would like better to

⁵⁸ Following a Government decision the house was sold for demolition in 1941. 'The Irish government had considered using it as a military hospital, but the local surveyors who looked over it considered that it was in such a state of neglect, after being empty for nine years, that the cost of making it habitable again would be too great to justify the expense' (Smythe 1983). Information from Gerry Keane of Keane's Merchants, Bridge Street, Gort, who was one of those sent to assess its condition. 'Evidently the lead must have been stolen recently as Catherine told me [Colin Smythe] that she and her husband had been up there less than 6 months before when it was as dry as a bone'. (Smythe 2004)). The decision to sell was therefore not made by the Forest Service as is often implied.

⁵⁹ James MacNeill, (1889-1938), Governor General 1928-32.

see than you, Lady Gregory!"

And when he came in I told him of the G.G.'s interest in planting, & that I would like him to see that fine book printed by them "Trodden Gold". He would not let me buy it, said he would give it – & so I wrote on a slip of paper above their printed "Talbot Press" "Presented to H.E. the Gov General from the (printed) *TALBOT PRESS* through the mediation of Lady Gregory" And I gave it to the chauffeur to take back to the lodge.

24 January, 1931 A letter from the Governor General thanking me for my share in sending him the *Trodden Gold*: "I have had time to do no more than look at it & read a few pages. I hope I have also done something that will please you even more than a sincere letter of thanks for your kindness. Mrs. O'Sullivan, wife of J.M O'Sullivan, Minister of Education, told me that her son⁶⁰ was interested in forestry & wanted to be a State forester when he finished his University Course. I thought that you would be pleased, for many reasons, and that Ireland would not be harmed if I had another copy sent to him (young O'Sullivan). The Talbot Press have done so. I am vain enough to think that I have done unobtrusively just what you would wish."

26 January, 1931. EV[ening?] Finding a gate open I walked through Pairc-na-Laoi – all except the few great beeches and except the ash saplings, my own planting – larch chiefly – & the silver – far above my head now & grown up from childhood to adolescence. I looked at them with pride. Some clearing of hazel and of rubbish around is needed & will come in good time.

10 February, 1931. Ld. Monteagle⁶¹ came for a couple of days and I was anxious he sh[oul]d. See the Forestry work – and O'Beirne took him for a 3 & a half hour walk, through Pairc-na-Tarav & to Isabella⁶² & to Inchy.

20 March, 1931. And a word about forestry. [In a speech to a University banquet, in London. Details not specified.]

30 March, 1931. And glad as I am that our woods are in the hands of the Forestry Department – their quiet & beauty is being of necessity spoiled – for the sake of more profitable future – & present – planting.

⁶⁰ Sean M. O'Sullivan, (1912-64). B.Agr.Sc. (Forestry) 1934. Chief Inspector, Forestry Division, Department of Lands, 1948-64.

⁶¹ Thomas Aubrey Spring Rice, 1883-1934, 3rd Baron Monteagle of Brandon.

⁶² The name 'Isabella' for a section of the woods was still in use in the 1950s, but pronounced (by the forest workers) 'eyes-abella'.

4 April, 1931. For Easter I've sent rhubarb, the first to Mrs. O'Beirne. [...]

A little drama this evening. I had been told by two "persons" that Ellen [a maidservant] was receiving young men in the evenings.[...]

May came to the drawing room about 7 o.c. & said two young men wanted to see me – Hayes and Baldwin – the two guests spoken of. I went down. They said they had heard I was told they had been coming here & assured me they had never done so. I said I had never mentioned their names – and asked Hayes if it was not a cousin of his who was in the S. African Police – & he said yes – & I told him of the letter he had written me about his reception by the Pope on his visit to Rome – a private audience at which he had received his Holiness blessing – & had rosaries blessed (as I had done on my presentation to Leo XIII (?) [*sic*]). And I told of the photograph he had sent me of himself standing alone with St. Peters as a background [...] So we parted on good terms – they had been glad to see in the papers that I had spoken at the University dinner. They praised the Forestry work, though the poor lad killed by fall of a tree at Athenry was a cousin of one of them. I had heard his father was not given compensation because the boy was under the age when woodcutters sh[ou]ld be engaged. But they said it was all right, his father had got £100 "it was Mr. Hogan managed that". They are to come & see me again when the apples are ripe. Rather a pleasant little meeting – & I repaid for saying I had never mentioned their names as being on Ellen's list.

4 September, 1931. Had O'Beirnes to tea. – a few bunches of grapes ripe enough to please the children. Very lame still.

24 April, 1932. A mild day – and more colour in the beech leaves in Shanwalla.

End of Journal Extracts

The final entry in the Journal is dated May 9, 1932.

Lady Gregory died early in the morning of 23 May 1932 and was buried in the New Protestant Cemetery in Galway (Hill 2005).

In the 1980s ownership of the Coole and Garryland properties of Gort state forest was transferred from the Forest Service to the Wildlife Service of the Office of Public Works (OPW) and in 1996 the Coole Park and Garryland Nature Reserve was constituted. It was not possible to consult later records relating to Coole and Garryland, whether held by Coillte or by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Office of Public Works.

Acknowledgements

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I thank Maureen O’Flanagan for drawing my attention to Saddlemyer, 2011.

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