

Six 18th Century Letters

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The following six letters, written between 1728 and 1764, are of interest to foresters in that they describe some planting at a relatively early date and they also illustrate the difficulties the early planters had in obtaining trees.

The first four letters¹ were written by various employees to Henry Boyle (1682-1764) who represented county Cork in the Irish House of Commons from 1727 to 1756 and who was also Speaker of the House from 1733 to 1756 when he was created Earl of Shannon.

The fifth and sixth letters² are from Anthony Foster to Sir Maurice Crosby. Anthony Foster (1705-1779) of Collon, County Louth, represented Dunleer in the Irish House of Commons from 1737 to 1760 and County Louth from 1761 to 1777. He was the father of John Foster, the prominent planter and last Speaker of the Irish House of Commons. The Prime Serjeant at Law mentioned in these letters was Anthony Malone (1700-1766) of Baronstown, Westmeath, M.P. for the county from 1727 to 1760.

With the exception of the first letter, the spelling has been modernised.

Castlemartyr
28 Mar 1728

Garratt Fleming to (Henry Boyle)

I have made so bold to send you some account of what I did since yr Hon. left hom. I got as many ash trees at Ballynacurrow as finished the work of Ballyoughtrow and as many English Ellams as filled up the ground where the Dutch Ellams was in the walk and have planted the Dutch Ellam within side the wall in the baron meadow. I have laid a great quantities of English and Dutch Ellams and have satt a great many English and Dutch cuttings of Ellam. Likewise a good quantity of English Ellam with firm mulberry (?) cuttings. I got 400 of English and Dutch Ellams from Mr Croker from the county of Limerick and have planted them out by way of a nursery in Maurish Joyce's garden and I got from the same gentleman as many Dutch aloor (poplar) as filled up the ground

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1. National Library, Ireland. Shannon papers, MS 13296, nos. 12, 23, 59, 80.
 2. National Library, Ireland. Talbot Crosbie papers, MS Box 188.

next to Cocker's orchard where the ash did not thrive and the high ground that is above that I planted with birch, the bowling green is planted with sickamore. I bought a thousand fir trees from Cott Maynard and filled up the auld nursery and what remained I planted them in the garden above the nursery. I have planted a great number of your cuttings in rows between the fir. I have bought a hundred of English Ellames and planted them where John Hannon had his potatoes I have sett a grate quantites of fillbuds deccaries and Crabstocks with a good quantity of walnuts and Phesnuts, the Phesnut walk is finished and the grass appears in it very fine. I have planted a great many yews and Lorroll on both sides of the walks for underwood and have left holes between the lorrell and yew in order to plant holly in them which is all at present from yr humble and most obedient servt.

28 Feb 1730

Peter Smith to Henry Boyle

Last night when I came home I found left at my house a box nailed with a direction on it to you and was told that a basket of trees came ashore with the box that was left in the watch house. I looked in the basket but not in the box. The weight and bulk of both one horse and trundle can carry with a great deal of ease which if you will send to Garretts on East Passage and forward your servants to Cove I will take care to send them with him by boats to where his carriage shall be.

Castlemartyr
30 March 1755

Robert Pratt to Boyle

Last Thursday's post brought your directions about the beech mast . . . William Flemon had his people last week mostly in the Garden and digging the nurseries, he also put a good many oaks into that strip of ground which lies north of the river and west of the bridge on the Cork road and as you said nothing about the grafting he would lose no more time and has gathered a good number of what we esteemed here the best kinds of fruits and of them we chose to have a good number of the glackguard (?). I cannot tell you for certain that the rows of elms by the river are entirely finished as to the cleaning of them as I was prevented from going down yesterday but Mountain who superintended that work promised me they should be done so I believe that job is over but I believe we shall give the french elms a day or two next week.

I cannot tell what effect this brushing will have on the future growth of the trees but for the present it has greatly improved their appearance. This week the ground shall be prepared and I hope sown with the beech mast. Dry weather would be of great use in picking that ground from all incumbrances but especially the scutch grass roots with which it is much overrun and as we had a pretty good deal of rain last week Flemon chose to wait for a day or two of dry weather before he sets about it. The seed shall be steeped in aloes water and every other of your directions followed but I have not yet consulted with Mr Flemon how we shall managed as to what beech are now growing in that land neither have you said anything about them but yesterday I went over part of that ground and found several poor miserable plants that may be said to exist but that is all. I do not know if they will bear transplanting but probably Flemon will not be at a loss to manage them.

Castlemartyr
28 August 1774

Robert Pratt to Shannon (Boyle)

Fleming (Flemon of earlier letters?) was almost affronted to think that he should be suspected for filling the hole near the great ash trees and says . . . that the seeds shrubs etc should and shall be all carefully attended to. We for a good while dispaired of the growing of the pine seed and I have been on my knees poking for it after we expected it ought to be up but at last what was sound of it I believe was less than half the seed was pleased to show itself above ground and so far it is in a good way.

Carrownekelly
22 March 1749

(Anthony) Foster to Sir Maurice Crosby at Ardaa.

I wrote to you from Drewstown in the county Meath believing the trees were on the road to Ardaa but by the damnable neglect of the person who Mr. Mahon trusted in town to get 'em from on board the vessel they were brought here upon Mr Daly's cars the mistake was owing to the bundles being marked with the Prime Serjeant's mark. The trees are in exceeding good health and will order them to be managed as I directed in my (?) . . . put into water for at least 6 days and nights, steeping fills the venells more than a month in the ground would do. The roots must be pruned

before they are put into the water. And as the (?) make the gardener prune the heads of the pears as if they were to be planted against the wall and he must leave two at least or three shoots or (?) on every tree which must not be shortened nor pruned but left to their whole length. Water them well after they are planted and over a week on very hot weather which must be done in the evening. These branches which are left on the trees are not to be beheaded or cut down till next winter and if the tree shoots strong they never will be shortened. The peach trees and filberts would be much the better of three or four days steep.

Baronstown
30 March 1749

Same to same

As I am so well satisfied of your care of trees that I will make all the trees good that fail or return the money. The Prime Serjeant did pay the carriage of the trees from London to to Chester and the freight etc and I think it would be proper you would write to him about it as they were marked with his mark and had a vast many parcels himself which made him pay for your bundles by a mistake.