

The Greening of Ireland – tenant tree-planting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

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Summary

Trees have always been central to the functional and symbolic life of communities. In Ireland, the conquests and plantations of the second half of the sixteenth and all of the seventeenth century saw the almost total eradication of the woodland cover both for economic and strategic purposes. Consequent to these changes, a cultural landscape of landlordism was created from the late seventeenth century. The planting of trees became a central symbol of this new civilisation. A series of parliamentary acts between 1698 and 1791 progressively provided greater incentives to tenants to plant and eventually to claim ownership of the trees they planted. A Register of Trees for 13 counties provides detailed evidence of the scale and character of tenant tree-planting between c.1760 and c.1900.

This paper seeks to locate tenant tree-planting in the wider economic and cultural contexts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It explores who the tenant tree-planters were, where they planted and what number and types of tree species they favoured. The greatest surge of tenant tree-planting was from the end of the eighteenth century to the period of the Great Famine. In this short phase, an enduring rural landscape of hedgerows, avenues, shelter belts and woodland plantations was created. For a variety of reasons, this expansive phase of tenant planting faded over the latter part of the nineteenth century, when the landlord system faced its last crisis and tenants were transformed into farm-proprietors.

Introduction

As a cultural-historical geographer, I must confess I know very little about trees and woodlands. I do know how to identify a good ash tree that curves into the primrose bank and has the makings of a few good hurleys. I still have an eye for orchards and ripe apples. Robbing the odd ash tree for hurleys and the parish priest's orchard for apples were part of my growing up in North Tipperary. Now, I wish I had paid more attention to my father when he talked about the many species of trees, their uses and folklore. But I did not. Today, I find myself returning to trees and see them as central to our life and being. It is a pleasure to speak here in the world of the Royal Dublin Society (RDS), which, from its beginning, was one of the great patrons of tree-planting in Ireland. It is a great honour to speak at this annual lecture in honour of Augustine Henry, whose volumes on *The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* I have perused and whose crisp replies to the Irish Forestry Committee of 1906 I have just read (Departmental Committee on Irish Forestry, 1908, 164-168).

My theme tonight is tenant tree-planting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I wish to share with you some thoughts on the overall spread and development of tree-planting across the country during these centuries, to discuss the changing fashions in the

species of trees planted, and to examine who these tenant tree-planters were to begin with. I also want to explore the meaning of all these developments and in particular, what tree-planting tells us about the wider changes in Irish society and culture in these centuries.

When looking for meaning, we probably should first listen to the poets and the writers. My first poetic source is an anonymous writer from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Most of you know this verse well:

Cad a dhéanfaimid feasta gan adhmaid
Tá deire na gcoillte ar lár
Níl trácht ar Chill Chais ná ar a teaghlach
Is ní bainfear a cling go bráth.

What shall we do for timber
The last of the woods is down
Kilcash and the house of its glory
And the bell of the house are gone.

(O'Connor, 1959, 45)

My second poetic voice is that of Austin Clarke:

When night stirred at sea
And the fire brought a crowd in
They say that her beauty
Was music in mouth
And few in the candlelight
Thought her too proud,
For the house of the planter
Is known by the trees.

(Garrity, 1965, 65)

My final speaker is Elizabeth Bowen, one of the great Irish writers of – amongst other things - the decline of the ascendancy. In 1940, she wrote:

Life in the big house, *in its circle of trees*, is saturated with character: this is, I suppose, the element of the spell. The indefinite ghosts of the past, of the dead who lived there and pursued the same routine of life in these walls add something, a sort of order, a reason for living, to every minute and hour. This is the order, the form of life, the tradition to which big house people still sacrifice much.

(Bowen, 1984, xvi)

Cill Chais (Kilcash) speaks not only of the destruction of the woodlands, but also the destruction and dislocation of the old aristocratic elites during the revolutions of the sev-

enteenth century – that most bloody and most devastating of all Irish centuries. Austin Clarke's poem points out the irony that the descendants of the settlers who often destroyed the seventeenth century woodlands were distinguished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for their care and passion for trees – for the landscape of the planter is known by the trees. The subject of Elizabeth Bowen's part biographical, part historical *Bowen's Court* is the loss of an ideal – the story of a minority when they lose confidence and go into decline. One of Bowen's central concerns is that this world of rootedness, acquisitions and permanence was and is at risk as she reflects on the fragility of what had looked like a lasting, enduring order (Lee, 1984, xvii).

As we shall see, a majority of the tenant tree-planters were connected with the cultural world of the Big House – indeed some were actually landlords. While sharing in the culture of tree-planting, some other tenant tree-planters came to participate in divergent socio-political movements, including that of the Land League, which would eventually engulf and destroy the Big House and create over much of the century a new state system and a farmer proprietorship.

Landlord culture and tree plantations

The Big House and its hedged and walled enclosures was to become the centre of rural life by the early eighteenth century, replacing the older tower house, bawn and adjacent hamlet cluster. Plantations of trees and estate villages were two great symbols of that new civilisation. The once relatively open landscape of banks and wattled fences yielded to a grid-iron pattern of regulated hedged fields. By the 1730s and 1740s the now large fashionable windowed mansion provided extensive views of the often exotic trees planted in the parkland demesnes. A new world of order and regimentation was being put in place – a classic Augustan landscape where, as Elizabeth Bowen points out, the now more secure, more confident descendants of the settlers began to feel and assimilate the influence of European fashions and ideals, including the fashion of constructing a timbered, disciplined and designed theatre of action (Bowen, 1984, 130-131). We therefore have to see the Big House and its tree plantations as symbols of a new maturing civilisation in Ireland, as part of a wider Enlightenment period which placed particular emphasis on order, progress, science, building and planting. This is the age of Improvement and Enclosure – of improvements in manners, speech and house-building, improvements in agricultural husbandry and the building of estate villages, and, above all, improvements in the landlords' rental incomes. Here the building of demesnes and tree-planting were central motifs. From the writings of, say, Jonathan Swift, and Thomas Prior of the RDS, who wrote his book on absentee landlords in 1729, one gets the feeling of a moral imperative to improve, of a kind of cultural crusade in favour of better styles of living (McMinn, 1992, 36-53; McMinn, 1994). In Swift's travel writings, an Irish countryside without quicksets and trees is seen as a symbol or badge of inferiority, whereas an Anglican sense of order is both celebrated and symbolised by new roads, big houses and hedged demesnes. The new alignment of Irish culture and society, therefore, also meant a total realignment of the landscape.

Thus, the new landed elites gained a feeling of greater security, an illusion that their society was destined to endure – just like the trees. Apart from their commercial and functional roles, the trees can therefore be seen as symbols or projections of a specific

hegemony, ideology and psychology. Trees stood for order, improvement and superior culture. Trees stood for privacy and private property, Trees were – like all ideologies and illusions – also involved in hiding things, and in particular, keeping the world beyond the demesne gates – the world of the ragged poor – out of sight and out of mind.

Table 1 summarises the main phases in the relationship between landlord culture and the destiny of the tree plantations. At least six of the seven periods illustrated are relevant to the story of tenant tree-planting. It is clear from the detailed lease provisions required by landlords for ‘middlemen/developers’ tenants from the 1690s onwards that ditching, hedging and tree-planting were essential instruments in farm development. Almost invariably such leases required the building of substantial two or one and a half storied stone-walled and slated dwellings as the battle between slate and thatch began. In addition, these leases generally required the head-tenant to plant a specific number of oak, ash and other trees on the outbounds of the farm, while also requiring the building of farms and stables and, most especially, the creation of one to three acre enclosures for the planting of orchards. These plantations of apple trees were potent symbols of the new culture. Parallel to these leaseholding requirements, the RDS involved itself in encouraging all forms of improvement through its premium schemes from the early 1740s (Berry, 1915, 59, 63, 386). By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, most of the wealthier lowland regions, for example, the commercial grazing lands of the Golden Vale, were enclosed, ditched and

Table 1. *Phases in the relationship between the landlord culture and trees.*

<i>I. HACKING OUT THE FRAMEWORK</i>		
c.1550-c.1660/90	‘Clearing a Space’ Conquest and plantations	Woodland clearance
<i>II. THE INFRASTRUCTURAL PHASE</i>		
c.1660/70-c.1730	‘Putting down Roots’ New towns, bridges, roads	Bounding, enclosing, classical Big House and parks
<i>III. THE PHASE OF ELABORATION</i>		
c.1730-c.1770	‘Growing Self-Confidence’ Swift, Prior, RDS, canals	Completion of lowland enclosures, Palladianism
<i>IV. THE CLIMAX PHASE</i>		
c.1770-c.1815/20	‘The Blossoming of the Culture’ Georgian Dublin as apex	Trees, Big Houses proliferate growing role of strong tenants
<i>V. REORIENTATIONS</i>		
c.1815/20-c.1870	‘Pruning Back’ In debt, sales, consolidations	Greater commercialisation, stronger tenantry
<i>VI. DISESTABLISHMENT PHASE</i>		
1870s-1930s	‘Uprooting’ The Land Acts	Hacking out again, farm proprietorship
<i>VII. EPILOGUE</i>		
Post-1930s	‘The Twilight of the Ascendancy’	New state afforestation

hedged with trees. It is therefore clear from the Register of Trees and other evidence that by the second half of the eighteenth century and especially from the 1790s onwards, a tenant class of significant substance had emerged to follow the lead of the landlord class. This group was to form a broader base in society for embellishing their holdings with fine trees and avenues. An increasing tendency is also evident in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century to plant trees for commercial purposes.

Tree-planting acts

Behind all of this was close on a century of state and institutional encouragement of tree-planting and conservation. Exclusive of support for 60 nurseries, the RDS granted premiums for a total of 55 million trees planted between 1766 and 1806. Between 1697 and 1791, there were at least seven parliamentary acts relating to tree-planting in Ireland. An act for planting and preserving timber trees and woods was passed in 1698 and came into force in 1703. Leaseholders for 11 years or more, who were renting less than 500 acres of land, were to plant each year for the term of 31 years, 10 trees of oak, fir, elm, ash, walnut, poplar and elder in some ditch or elsewhere. Such trees were to be preserved from destruction but it is relevant to note that they still remained the property of the landlord. Legislation also required those involved in ironworks – the old bogey of the woods – to plant and enclose 500 able trees per annum. Those holding leases for over 500 acres were required to enclose and hedge one plantation acre of trees per annum for a period of 20 years. In total, the 1698 act envisaged the compulsory planting of one-quarter million trees per annum and obliged the landlords to ensure that the tenants also planted. Target planting lists were drawn up for each county and barony. Supervision of planting was to be carried out by the county Grand Juries, while the parish constable and church wardens were involved in the monitoring of tenant planting within the parish.

After 1698, there followed a series of acts on tree-planting and preservation in 1708, 1710, 1721, 1731, 1765, 1789 and 1791 (McCracken, 1971, 135-141). The 1721 act was the first that granted tenant proprietorship to one-third of the trees they planted. However, no rules for the registration of such trees appear to have been included in the act. The key year of 1731, which saw the foundation of the RDS, the debate over Prior's publication on absentee landlords, the building of the first – 'Newry' – canal, and Swift's writings on Ireland's need for economic self-sufficiency, also saw the introduction of a series of acts relating to the improvement of barren and waste land, the planting of timber trees and orchards, and the proper bounding and enclosing of farm units, with greater stress being placed on ditching, quicksetting and hedging. The act relating to tenant tree-planting stressed that half of such trees planted were the property of the tenant, provided he/she completed a very cumbersome process of certification. There is, however, little if any evidence that this act was a successful initiative, although RDS premiums for tree-planting did become a feature in the next decade.

The first really effective act was that of 1765, which enacted that any tenant holding for years exceeding 12 unexpired years who planted sally, osiers and willows could cut and use the same. It goes on to state that a tenant who planted any trees of oak, ash, elm, fir, pine, walnut, chestnut, horse chestnut, willow or poplar, should be entitled to these trees, provided that each person carrying out such planting within six months lodge with the

Clerk of the Peace of the county a certificate under the name of the tenant containing the number and kind of trees planted. Such a certificate was to be kept in a separate file among the records of the county and entered into an alphabetical book. The 1765 act therefore entitled tenants to ownership of the trees or their value on the expiry of the lease.

The 1789 act is equally important and even more deliberately detailed. It begins by commenting on the failure of earlier schemes and notes that whereas the laws for the encouragement of tenants to plant trees had proved generally ineffective, tenants with a 14 year lease or more were now entitled to cut and fell trees during the time of their lease, providing that they register such trees within 12 months of planting.

In contrast, the 1791 Act is more confidently concerned with issues of tree preservation. It is also relevant to note that Col. Samuel Hayes of Avondale published *A practical treatise on planting* in 1791. The scene had been set for a great surge of tenant tree-planting with Grattan's Parliament providing for a large increase in monies to the RDS to be used in premiums to encourage tree-planting.

The recording and registration of tenant-planted trees took place at the quarter sessions of the county, were printed in the Government Gazette and entered into a ledger. These ledgers, each called a Register of Trees, have survived, in whole or in part, for 13 Irish counties. However, those for Longford, Louth and Monaghan are so incomplete as to be not very useful for research purposes. The better ledgers relate to Cavan, Cork, Kildare, Kilkenny, Limerick, Londonderry, Offaly, Sligo, Tipperary and Waterford. The information entered in these ledgers vary. Some, like that for Co. Cork, are very detailed and include entries in chronological order which state the names of the tenant and the landlord, the location of the plantation by parish and barony, the date of plantation and the number of each types of trees planted. Some county records do not detail the number or type of trees but simply provide a record of the number of tenants registering per annum. It must again be emphasised that the information contained in these ledgers only relates to tenant tree-planting, since landlords had no need to prove possession of their trees.

Now and again one actually gets a glimpse of where precisely the trees were being planted. In 1773, Robert Power of Moone parish, Co. Kildare, distributed his small plantations of 396 trees as follows. -

Nineteen ash, 19 alder and 10 elm in hedgerows at the back of the Castle Paddock, 144 ash and 11 alder in the lime kiln field and 121 ash and 8 alder in the Grove Park as well as 28 ash and 36 alder in the Paddock at the rear of the dwelling house.

Meanwhile, Joshua Hubbard of Ballymurn planted 180 ash on "the ditch of the road leading from my dwelling to Maynooth" (McCracken, 1973-4, 312-313). John Leader in Cullen parish near Millstreet, Co. Cork, planted 156 fir in the ditch south of the road near the Blackwater Bridge, 134 alder in the ditch between the bog meadow and the bog and Garrane, "as well as 60 fir on the east side of the bog meadow and 78 alder at the same place" (McCracken and McCracken, 1976).

The scale and distribution of tenant tree-planting

As illustrated in Table 2, the majority of tenant tree-planters put in less than 5,000 trees, while a quarter planted less than 1,000 trees.

Table 2. *Percentage of planters in each of three categories.*

<i>Number of trees planted</i>	<i>Percentage distribution of planters in each category</i>					
	<i>Cork</i>	<i>Tipperary</i>	<i>Kildare</i>	<i>Offaly</i>	<i>Sligo</i>	<i>Londonderry</i>
Under 5,000	58	75	67	75	64	67
5,000-10,000	19	12	15	15	15	17
Over 10,000	22	13	18	10	21	16

Clearly, the Register of Trees documents the actual construction of the often still surviving rural landscape of trees in hedgerows, along domestic avenues, as shelter belts, in small field corners, along river-banks and roads, and in parklands. These tenants - often small tree-planters - therefore completed the process of landscape enclosure and embellishment in the latter end of the eighteenth century, and especially over the first half of the nineteenth century, a process which had been initiated by the landlords from the 1660s onwards. Large tenant tree-planters with a strong commercial bias were more unusual. Co. Cork was to the forefront with members of this group. Nine Cork planters alone accounted for 14% of the total tenant tree-planting in the county of nine and a half million trees. These commercial planters were much more geared to coniferous tree-planting and related timber sales. The largest planter amongst them - Benjamin Clarke-Fisher - planted only 10,000 deciduous trees out of his crop of 402,000 trees (McCracken and McCracken, 1976, 43).

In terms of regional variations in the timing and number of trees planted by tenants, Figure 1 highlights three clear regional trends between 1765 and 1900. The three regions identified are (i) the West, (ii) the East and North, and (iii) the Munster counties excluding Co. Waterford. Both for ecological and class reasons, western counties show a more reduced rate of tenant tree-planting over the period. Problems of soils, altitude and exposure, but more particularly, the absence of a solid tenant farming class, militated against tree-planting in these areas. Eastern and northern counties display a stable and solid distribution of tree-planting over the whole period. These counties occupy the modal position in the islandwide pattern. In contrast, the Munster counties display a double boom in tree-planting. The first expansive phase of tree-planting dipped strongly between 1815 and 1820 and dramatically increased again after the 1820s. The Munster picture, therefore, more faithfully reflects the crisis in the Irish economy that followed on from the ending of the Napoleonic wars. It could well be that changes in agricultural conditions and prices may have bitten deeper into the fabric of the hitherto buoyant regional economy of the South. Strategic adaptations to post-war agricultural trends may have, therefore, expressed themselves earlier and more strongly in these Munster counties.

Large counties such as Cork and Tipperary - given their size, diverse ecologies, settlements and class structures - reflect a similar range of local responses in the timing and

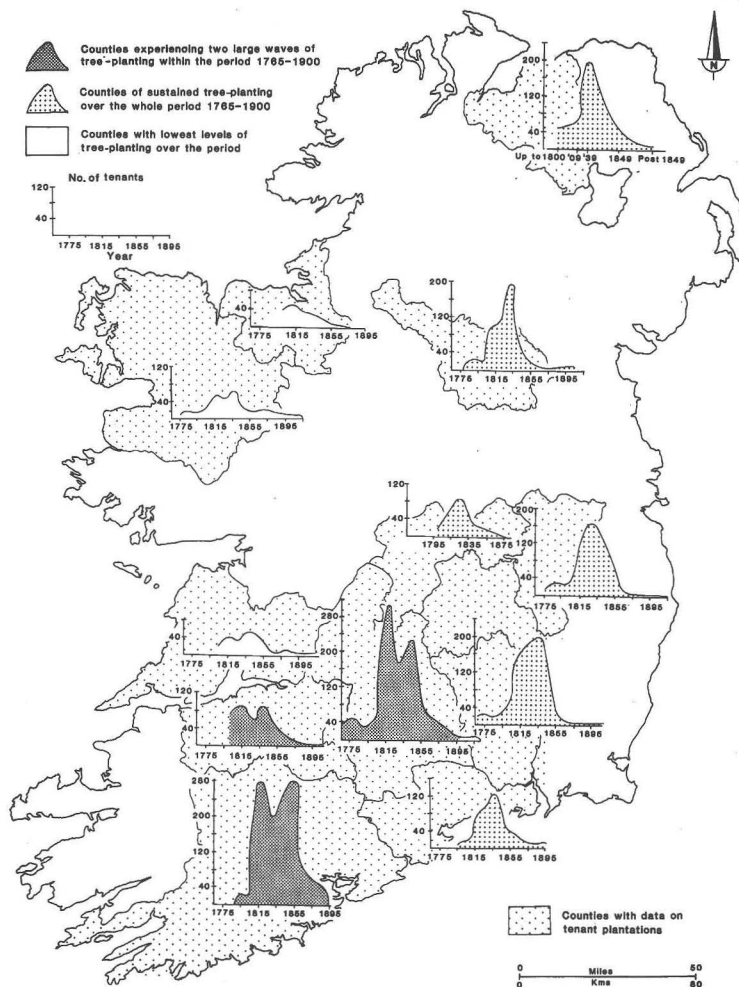


Figure 1. *Distribution of tenant tree-planting by county, 1765-1900.*
Source: Register of Trees, National Archives. (Figures 1, 2 and 3 were first used in Cork, History and Society, Geography Publications, Dublin, 1993.)

intensity of tree-planting as orchestrated across the island as a whole. We can use Co. Cork as a quick case study to try and unravel the local processes operative in the spread and consolidation of tree-planting habits among the strong tenant classes. Since investment in tree-planting was very much a long-term one, the diffusion of tenant tree-planting is not only an indicator of landscape change, but also provides an indirect guide to the geo-

graphical distribution and expansion of rural wealth over the period 1760 to 1900. The diffusion pattern no doubt reflects the social aspirations of tree-planting tenants as the fashion of landlord landscaping is imitated at the next social level and moves sideways to be embraced by a wider spectrum of the society. These patterns probably also reveal the slow evolution of a more comfortable farming class. In addition, such tree-planting records provide clues as to the timing and distribution of new house-building as well as to the spread of ornamental gardens and avenues amongst the comfortable strong farmer group and the lesser gentry. It is probably safe to assume that these landscape transformations were also accompanied by internal changes in farm house arrangements such as the emergence of a separate kitchen area, the development of flower and vegetable gardens and the building of barns and stables. Charles Vallancey's map (Figure 2) illustrates how much of a gentrified landscape – created both by landlords and big leaseholders – had been already put in place in Co. Cork by 1778 (Smyth, 1993). Co. Cork is adjudged to have had 30 new mansion houses in 1660. By 1750, this figure had risen to approximately 259, and by Vallancey's time, to approximately 350. The number of Big Houses is likely to have doubled again by 1841.

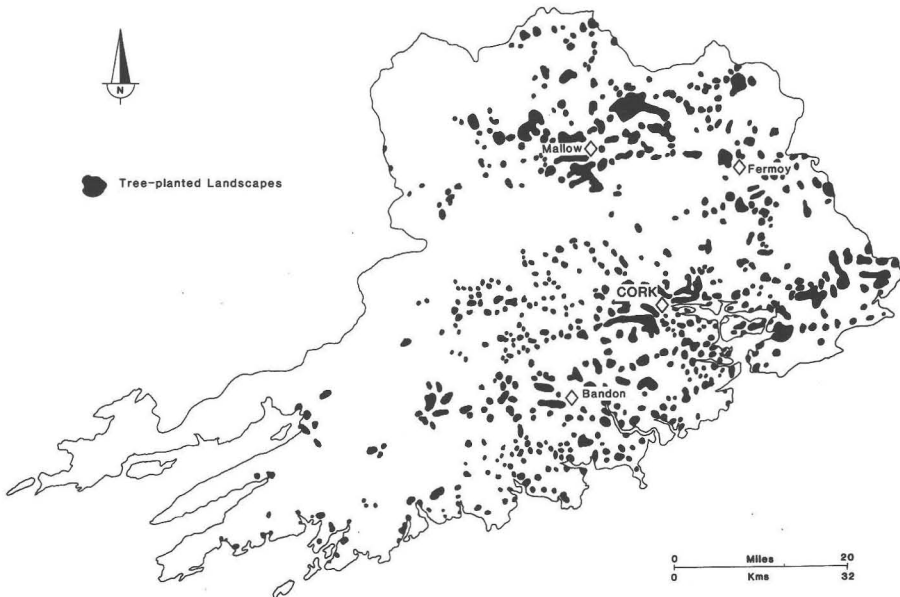


Figure 2. *Gentlemen's seats and tree-planted landscapes in County Cork, c.1780.*
Source: Vallancey's Military Survey of the South of Ireland, 1778-1782.

The actual diffusion pattern of tenant tree-planting in Co. Cork from 1790 to 1870 (Figure 3) is due to a variety of factors such as varying tenurial and class structures, landlord patronage or its absence, the quality of land, size of farms, nature of farm economy, proximity to towns and villages, and access to a range of information and skills which regard the tree registration together with the ecological factors affecting tree-planting, such as altitude and exposure. Yet the geographical picture that emerges is not an unsurprising one. The core area of early tenant tree-planting and landscape embellishment is the great arc of mixed farming and tillage land that curves from Cork Harbour to Youghal and pivots around the rich barony of Imokilly. Even as early as 1778, Vallancey was to observe that “plain neat houses, small pleasure gardens and pretty tree plantations began to rise in proportion as traffic to Cork city rises” (Vallancey, 1778, 8). While all Cork regions may have shared in the great upsurge of economic activity that characterised the climax period of landlordism from 1770 to 1820, it is likely that it was the most commercialised mixed farming and malting barley regions which benefited most from the upsurge. These were the zones of most advanced farming systems, and had the most stratified rural societies with a plentiful supply of labour power. For example, the wider Cork city region centered on Barrymore and Imokilly were also regions of early cowhouse building. The spread of innovative farming societies is also relevant to the early diffusion of tree-planting. Castle-martyr, between Cork city and Youghal, had such an agricultural society as far back as the

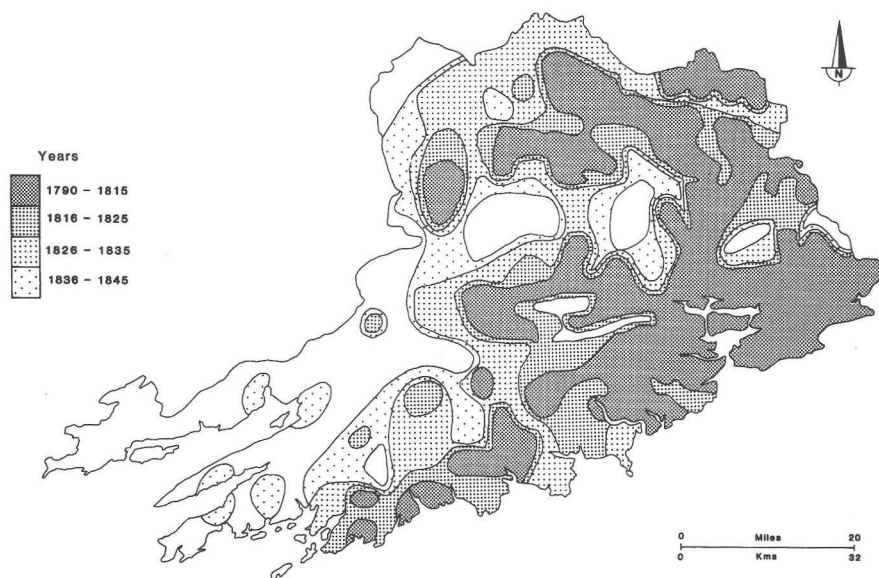


Figure 3. *The diffusion of tenant tree-planting in County Cork from 1790 to 1845.*
Source: Register of Trees, National Archives.

mid eighteenth century. By the first decade of the nineteenth century, six such societies had emerged, all except one – Fermoy – within a 15 mile radius of Cork city.

The north Cork lowlands were also innovative and gentry-led, not only in relation to tree-planting but also in cattle breeding, cowhouse building and stall-feeding. After 1815-20, however, as the wave of tree-planting reached saturation stage in the south-east, the surge of planting spread westwards and northwards, perhaps also reflecting the greater prosperity of the cattle dairying areas in the post 1820s. Later it is also noticeable that as timber imports from Canada and elsewhere started to grow, the great coniferous planters became less enthusiastic. This also appears to have been the case near the port-cities of Derry and Sligo. This commercial group were major players in the tree business, especially between 1820 and 1850.

Types of trees and tenant tree-planters

Trends in the types of trees planted is very instructive. In the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century, broadleaf species were favoured over coniferous species by about a 7:3 ratio. A significant shift began in the 1820s, however, and by the 1840s, coniferous varieties outnumbered the broadleaved by 6:4, and by the 1850s, by as much as 4:1. Amongst the broadleaves, ash was the most favoured, followed by beech, oak and alder. Three-quarters of all broadleaf trees planted in Cork, Londonderry, Offaly and Sligo were of these four types. Sycamore, birch, elm and poplar were also reasonably common in mixed plantations, with mountain ash, horse chestnut, willows and other species bringing up the rear. It appears that approximately 80% of tenant tree-planting – as in the detailed examples provided above – were of mixed plantations. The actual ratio as revealed in the 1841 Census was 67% to 33%, but these figures include orchards where there was a 12:1 ratio in the number of orchards *vis-à-vis* apple trees planted individually in hedgerows.

The most favoured coniferous trees in mid nineteenth century Ireland were larch, Scots pine and Norway spruce. In Co. Kildare, almost a million larch trees were planted out of a total of 1.7 million coniferous trees registered by tenants – of the latter, 0.5 million were Scots pine and 0.2 million were Norway spruce. In Co. Cork, of the 6.25 million coniferous trees planted by tenants, over three million (47%) were larch, 2.3 million (36.6%) Scots pine, and 0.8 million Norway spruce. All other conifers represented only 3.1% of the total planted. There was, therefore, a high level of specialisation in the type of coniferous species planted.

Of Co. Cork's broadleaves, 21.6% or over 0.7 million were ash, 20.5% or under 0.7 million were beech, 18.9% oak (0.6 million), 15.1% alder, 12.0% sycamore, 7.1% elm and 3.0% birch. The remainder constituted 5.4% of the total. These remaining trees were very interesting species in their own right. In Co. Kildare, they included poplar, willows, horse chestnut, limes, hornbeam, other chestnuts and many hollies, as well as arbutus, copper beech, walnut, other kinds of pine and oak, the occasional maple, acacia, juniper, bird cherry and cedar, and the rare monkey puzzle and wellingtonia. These trees best epitomised the embellishment functions of tree-planting and carry the aroma of the mini-arboreta that is sometimes still to be found around sturdy old farmhouses. These are now museum pieces of the tree-planting fashions of mid nineteenth century Ireland.

Changing fashions and tastes bring us to the social background of the tenant tree-planters. Five categories of planters can be identified. For a small but very significant group of planters, the term 'tenant', while strictly correct, is misleading. Quite a number of landlords are included in these lists precisely because they were renting land from other landlords - often on very long leases - and so were obliged to register their tree plantations on such lands so as to secure their ownership. For example, the O'Callaghan family of Viscount Lismore at Shanbally Castle near Clogheen in Co. Tipperary planted 70,000 trees on a nearby rented townland in 1817/18. Similarly, out of one-third of a million trees planted after 1840 in Co. Offaly, 160,000 were planted by the Earl of Rosse in Eglish parish on lands owned by Lawrence Parsons. And in Sligo, the Gore-Booths planted 78,000 trees between 1822 and 1827 on rented land in Drumcliff parish "under Ben Bulbin's head" (McCracken, 1973, 225-226).

A second group of really strong planters belonged to that class which Arthur Young dismissed as "parasitic middlemen" in the 1780s. These were the often wealthy leaseholding tenants who held a prestigious home farm but made their incomes from intensive subletting of other townlands which they held on very long leases from landlords, whether absentee or not. At a popular level, many of these middlemen would have been perceived as landlords in their own right and in economic terms they were often just as powerful. They too were obliged to register the trees they planted on such leasehold lands.

A third major group of planters were the emerging rural and urban bourgeoisie - the well-to-do flour millers, brewers, distillers and linen drapers who built big spacious houses and parklands to reflect their wealth and status. A fourth group comprised the now growing middle-classes, led by parson and priest, but also including solicitors, doctors, agents and others who likewise surrounded their new Georgian houses with avenues and parklands.

Finally, it is clear that the biggest single group were the strong 'working' farmers, actively engaged in the business of improved farming and building ditches, hedgerows and shelters. These farmers planted less for ornamental purposes and much more for the protection of their cattle and crops, the better draining and hedging of their fields, for timber needs and for all the practical reasons associated with farm improvement current at the time.

I have examined in detail the social origins of the tenant tree-planters for two regions - my own home area around Roscrea on the Offaly-Tipperary borderlands, and more particularly, the barony of Offa and Offa west in south-west Tipperary which borders on the counties of Waterford, Cork and Limerick. In this latter region, half of the tenant planters are working farmers - very often of the strong farming class but also including some go-ahead small farmers such as Michael Lonergan of Boolakennedy, who planted 1,000 trees on the edge of his Galtee Mountain farm. Close on one-quarter of the tree-planters were of the gentry class and involved landlords and major leaseholding middlemen. A very significant 17% were mill-owners of various kinds while a further 8% came from the professional middleclasses (Smyth, 1976, 47-48). Much the same proportions emerge from the Roscrea region. Yet in the Co. Cork lists it is clear that the gentry class is somewhat more significant. Another group which emerges more strongly in this county centered on the great port city of Cork is the merchant investors in land and timber. Not surprisingly, Co. Cork heads the nation in the list of tree-planters of over 10,000 trees -

nearly one-quarter of its planters were involved at this level. Figures for Sligo, Londonderry and Kildare would also suggest that greater proximity to port cities and easier facilities for selling timber increased the merchant proportion among planters. In the counties of Cork and Sligo, however, the greater availability of poorer land for coniferous planting may also have influenced these regional patterns.

The tree-planting tenants were therefore a mixed and highly interesting elite group. Using surname analysis, one can also attempt to gauge what proportion of the tree-planters bore pre-sixteenth century surnames as opposed to settler names brought into Ireland from the late sixteenth century onwards. In Co. Tipperary, 55% of the names belong to long established families such as the Meaghers, Ryans, Burkes and Butlers, while 45% belong to the post sixteenth century period of colonisation. In Co. Kildare, the ratio was 60:40 in favour of 'new' immigrant names. In Cork, the ratio was 62% 'new' to 38% 'old' surnames.

Given the composition of the population as a whole, it is clear that a disproportionate number of tenant tree-planters came from either the Protestant ascendancy class or the next well-to-do leaseholding layer beneath it. David Dickson (1982) has emphasised that from the late seventeenth century and for most of the eighteenth century, landlords preferred to grant long leases to "the industrious improving Protestant head tenants". On the other hand, the significant proportion of 'working farmers' bearing old surnames point to the crucial bridging role played by this class in the wider Irish society. These middlemen farmers, whether Protestant or, more particularly, Catholic, were the cultural and economic brokers between the needs and fashions of the landed elite on the one hand, and the people of the townlands on the other. This elite tenant group often mediated issues of rent and agricultural prices, encouraged the use of slated housing and better farm implements, and led the charge in the planting of orchards and tree-lined hedgerows. Examples of the lifestyles of this group really emerge from the novels of Charles Kickham, the Banim brothers and Gerald Griffin. But it is important to emphasise that these tree-planters still constituted the elite of the tenants. In Co. Cork, for example, this group still only comprised one-half of the total number of occupiers with first class houses in the 1841 Census.

Summary and conclusions

The great wave of tenant tree-planting was coming to a close when that most exhaustive of surveys - the 1841 Census - was made. A quite extraordinary two-page summary of woods and plantations in the Census (Report of the Census Commissioners, 1841, xxix-xxx) allows us to catch a glimpse of the *islandwide* story of tree-planting by tenants and landlords in 1841. There are clearly problems in establishing how comprehensive this tabular data set is. However, given Thomas Larcom's involvement - and his checking of some dubious tree returns against the first edition Ordnance Survey six-inch maps - I am happy to see these tables as providing the most reliable indicators we have of the distribution of trees in the mid nineteenth century.

The overall acreage of trees planted - whether in woodland plantations or elsewhere - was returned as close on one-half million acres of trees (487,558 acres). This figure is in part estimated. While the acreage of the woodlands could be more readily checked, the equivalent acreage of detached trees in hedgerows, etc. is estimated at a ratio of 160 trees

per acre. It is not clear if a single multiplier is sufficient to allow for the varying spacing requirements of either different species of trees or young mature plantings. Therefore, the figures for detached trees must remain a 'guestimate' (Tim Crowley, pers. comm.). A second great unknown is the ratio of landlords to tenant tree plantations. In Co. Londonderry, the major landowners were the London Companies and the Established Church. Yet these owners only planted 700 out of the total of 7,000 acres in the county. As Eileen McCracken notes, "it is likely that tenant planting accounted for the remaining acreage". For Co. Cork, my guestimate is a 25% to 75% ratio in favour of tenant leaseholders.

The cumulative impact of all tree-planting by 1841 is revealing. Three types of regions emerge – firstly there is an area of relatively high woodland and tree coverage led by Co. Waterford where 5.7% of the land surface was in this category. This belt of high tree density extends through South Leinster onwards into Louth and Armagh. A second region of intermediate but still significant levels of wood and tree-plantings stretches from Cork, Tipperary and Limerick through the Midlands and up to Derry and Antrim. Finally, in the more difficult and exposed parts of the west and north-west, where the rapidly expanding, often desperately poor, populations had other things to bother them apart from tree-planting, we find the lowest tree densities.

Mapped at the Poor Law Union level (but for the later time of 1890), pockets of very high tree-planting emerge particularly around Castlebar, Sligo and Gort in Connaught (Figure 4). The core of high planting in Munster is around Clonmel and Lismore, followed by the Killarney and Roscrea areas. In Leinster, the great fulcrum of tree plantations was along the eastern parts of Dublin and Wicklow, in the lower Nore valley of Kilkenny, as well as that great zone of plantations which cover much of Laois and South Offaly and continues into North Tipperary. In Ulster, the core areas are around Newry and the Mourne and in the Bangor-Ards area. By way of contrast, Bangor-Erris, the Glenties and the Dingle peninsula present the most exposed and naked landscape of the mid to late nineteenth century.

The 1841 Census also records the great surge of tree-planting between 1791 and 1841. The acreage under woodlands and trees is judged to have increased from 143,000 acres in 1791 to close on 500,000 by 1841. There was therefore at least three and a half times the number of planted trees in Ireland by 1841 than existed a half-century earlier. Landscape, economy and society had been radically transformed in these dramatic decades that stretched from the French Revolution to the Famine.

In terms of species type, the least change recorded was in the number and extent of oak trees. This old reliable aristocratic tree had become less fashionable over these decades but remained solidly anchored in the rich counties of the south. While occupying a similar distribution, ash may also have figured as a fashionable pre-coniferous type of planting in the poorer lands of the north and west in the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries. With the advance of larch and spruce, it then faded in these regions. New species such as beech and then elm were becoming more fashionable in the 1820s and 1830s respectively, but these were more clearly concentrated in the warm rich lands of the Pale, south Leinster and east Munster. Co. Cork was the elm leader, while Co. Wexford led with beech.

Mixed plantations which made up four out of every five woodland plantations reveal a very steady rise up to the 1830s and then tail off in the 1840s. The most dramatic change is in the planting of coniferous trees which saw a sixteen-fold increase between 1791 and

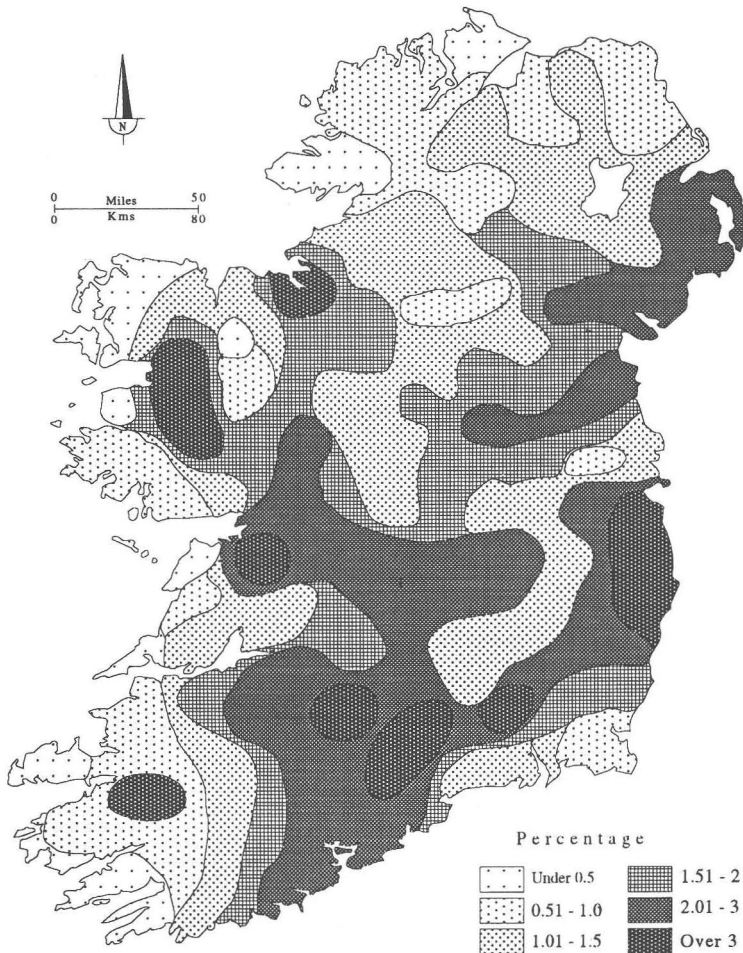


Figure 4. *Percentage of land surface covered by woods and plantations per poor law union c.1890. Source: Report of Department of Agriculture Committee on Forestry, 1908.*

1841, as compared to only a fourfold increase in the overall tree total. Coniferous planting doubled between 1800 and 1810, doubled again between 1810 and 1820 in a great surge, and increased by 1.4 times by 1830. There is some reduction in the *rate* of coniferous planting by 1841. Yet the scale of planting in the Famine decade is still higher than in the 1810s or 1820s. By this time also, the coniferous tree plantations marked the end of the frontier of rural population and settlement expansion along the mountain and bog edges which had grown dramatically from the mid eighteenth century. Trees now colonised the

abandoned fields as landlords like Viscount Lismore planted more extensive woodlands along the edge of mountains such as the Galtees and Knockmealdowns. Famine deaths, large-scale emigration and tree plantations were all entwined in a single, complex but brutal equation.

Regional dynamics in hedgerow planting is very difficult to document as the 1841 Census does not attempt to detail their spread. However, one key diagnostic feature – and not documented in the Register of Trees – is the apple tree (and other fruit trees such as plums and cherries) which remained outside the terms of the various tree-planting acts. The Census does detail the planting of orchards for each decade in the previous half-century and orchards may be a likely indicator of the timing of the overall enclosure process.

Figure 5 illustrates the percentage distribution of orchards planted between 1821 and 1830. Apart from the western and most particularly, the south-eastern counties of Carlow and Wexford (where enclosures may have come later, due to their very intensive tillage economy), it appears that it is primarily the province of Ulster which is last in the completion of the enclosures and hedging process. Proudfoot's (1993, 231-232) comments on enclosures as evidenced in the first edition O.S. six-inch maps corroborate the findings shown in the regional variations in the timing and spread of orchard plantations. Another factor here is the growing industrial wealth of the north-east which saw a new class of wealthy linen drapers and industrialists building big houses at this time in countryside locations with their usual panoply of tree-lined embellishments. The last frontier of orchards and hedgerow planting appears to be in South Ulster, especially in the drumlin belt stretching from South Armagh through Monaghan into Cavan.

By the 1870s, the tide of tenant tree-planting had run its course. The Land Acts are central here, as later on was the cultural revolution inspired by Yeats and others, the Gaelic League, and that powerful popular movement orchestrated by the Gaelic Athletic Association, which in turn made for an assault on curved ash trees. The hurlers were on the green. This is where I began this story. But I will not stop there – I prefer to leave the last word to Elizabeth Bowen. Unlike, for example, Standish O'Grady's passionate attempt to reclaim a lost Irish past, what interests Elizabeth Bowen is her own culture's decline. That is not to say that she is unaware that the Big House settler world had driven 'Gaelic' culture underground to produce its rich poetry of lament. Rather, she tells the story of a new dispossession, as woodlands are again hacked down before the fall of the final curtain for landlordism. Elizabeth Bowen was to write that "only the dispossessed people know their lands in the dark". Kilcash and Bowen's Court had become the one story, part of the many braided river that is Irish life, on whose banks many trees of diverse origin stand and flourish.

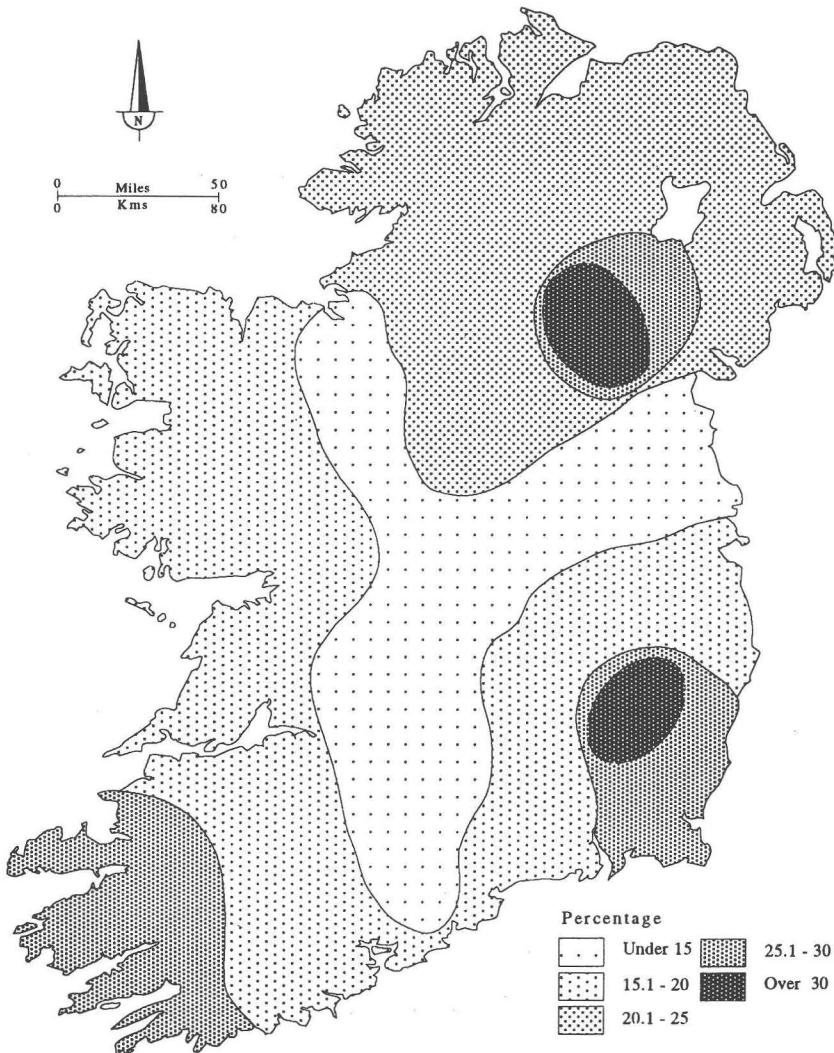


Figure 5. *Relative distribution of orchards planted between 1821 and 1830.*
Source: 1841 Census.

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