

A Practical Treatise on Trees by Samuel Hayes. Reprinted facsimile edition (2003) with a foreword by Thomas Pakenham, New Island, 200 pp, hardback, €30. ISBN 1 902602

The full title of the work is *A practical treatise on planting and management of woods and coppices*. Originally published in 1794, it was the first ever book on tree planting in Ireland. This facsimile edition is elegantly case-bound, and is expertly reproduced. Included are the original engravings, illustrations and gatefolds. The endpaper has an image of Avondale House and grounds, taken from the watercolour by DA Beauford, from the late 1700s. It shows the estate with some of the trees planted by Hayes, in an otherwise open landscape.

Most Irish foresters will have heard about this book but few will have read it, as it has been being out for print for almost two centuries. It originally appeared in three editions, first in 1794, followed by two reprints in the early 19th century (both now as rare and valuable as the original). Best known from the book are the fourteen vignettes taken from copper etchings. They appear individually on the title page, tailpieces and in the body of the text. Down the years they have been extensively copied, as copyright has of course long ago expired. They also adorn many another book, including the original guide to Avondale Forest Park.

This facsimile edition is the brainchild of the Irish Tree Society, an organisation set up in 1990 to promote an appreciation of specimen trees. It is reproduced from a copy of the book purchased by the Irish Tree Society at auction in 2000. This particular book has itself an interesting history. It belonged to the late Charles Acton, former music critic of the Irish Times, and one time owner of Kilmacurragh Estate in Co Wicklow. He came into its possession through an ancestor, to whom Hayes presented an autographed copy. The Actons and Hayeses were near neighbours in east Co Wicklow, at Kilmacurragh and Avondale.

Commissioned by members of the Dublin Society (now the Royal Dublin Society) to write a simple guidebook, Hayes wanted to do more than merely instruct people how to plant and manage trees. He said he wanted to inspire his countrymen to love trees. His early death in 1795, only a year after the book was published, cut short what would almost certainly have been an even greater contribution to Irish silviculture. Today, the oldest trees at Avondale including individual beech, oak and larch specimens, the striking Spanish chestnut that frames the house and the two gigantic silver fir by the Avonmore River, are a fitting memorial to Hayes.

Thomas Pakenham's lucidly written foreword puts Hayes in context. If Hayes had not written the book he would have been almost completely lost in the shadows – as it is he remains elusive. He was an Irish MP, barrister, amateur architect, draftsman and passionate planter of trees. These interests are reflected in his work in designing the house at Avondale and planting the estate. A further indication of Hayes's interest in trees is that in 1788 he presented a bill to the Irish parliament with the title *An act for encouraging the cultivation and better preservation of trees*.

The book itself is in two parts; the first provides instruction on tree planting, while part two takes a tour around the estates of the time and describes their specimen trees. This is where history is of help to foresters. It is from the reference to beech at Shelton Abbey that we learn that it was here that it was first planted in Ireland, in the 17th century. Seed from the trees at Shelton was used in other parts of the country.

Mention of beech gives Thomas Pakenham an opportunity to expound on beech being classified as an exotic, which it is. He states "that Hayes noticed that beech seems particularly well suited to Ireland, by contrast, some modern ecologists advocate a kind of ethnic cleansing in which naturalised species such as beech are systematically hunted down and destroyed". Of course foresters know that to say that beech seems particularly well suited to Ireland needs qualification - to add "... where soil conditions are right and shelter is available or provided."

Pakenham provides a very useful index; the listing of locations shows that Hayes never moved far from the east of Ireland, visiting Meath, Kildare, Kings County (Offaly) and Queens County (Laois). There is one reference to Bellevue, Co Galway, the only one in the West!

Reading the book requires some concentration because, as a facsimile, it retains the 18th century use of f to denote an s. However, after a few pages the reader soon gets familiar with the script.

Having a book republished after 200 years is an exciting development. *A Practical Treatise on Trees* will be a revelation to a new generation of foresters and tree enthusiasts. With a print run of 1500 it could soon become as valuable as the first edition!

John Mc Loughlin

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