

“A Walk Through Silver Grove Townland (Inchigeelagh Parish) With Kevin Corcoran and Teddy Cook Who Will Trace The Gradual Changing Landuse Since the 1640 Survey” –

Heritage Week 2013 (Sat. August 24th)



Conor McAuliff O' Leary is listed in the 1640/1 Muskerry Survey (published in 1656) as landowner of 1,800 acres in the Parish of Inchigeelagh, including the Townland of 'Deryargid' of 395 Acres. Both subsequent 19th Century Ordinance Surveys (1849/1879) describe this Townland as Silver Grove – a translation of 'Doire Airgid'. Very many of our Parishes' Townlands (318) include the gaelic 'Doire – Derry – Derreen' in the placename.

Participants gathered in advance of the Outing (through Toby and Jenny Roses' 130 Acre Farm) in the recently reroofed and rescued single storey early house of Dan Patsy Dan McCarthy's early 19th Century dwelling. Throughout the 19th Century's various Census and Tithe Records – including the 'Survey of Landowners 1875' and later Griffith Survey (available at all libraries in Co. Cork) this Townland is held by 3 McCarthy Farmsteads – there has always been a Daniel; John or Cornelius and Patrick – hence the distinguishing colloquial "Dan Patsy Dan".

A stone's throw west is a second dwelling (likely a 1920/30's replacement farmhouse) and a stone's throw east is likely later 19th Century (itself also a replacement farmhouse). The late Johnny McCarthy (d. 2010) who passed over without direct heir, occupied this eastern 2 storey farmhouse – Johnny told the author that his people could trace 14 generations in Silver Grove – and all 3 families came from this one. Neighbours have verified the '14 generations' claim. In 1641, the 70 square mile Parish had 2 McCarthy Landowners – both holdings far to the west towards Gougane Barra.

Of the 39 landowners in 1641, 36 were “O’ Leary” – hence the pseudonym “Uibh Laoighre”. The 39th was an “O’ Connell” – a wheelright in Keemcorrovolly Townland. Silver Grove was one of 15 Townlands granted to James Barry, Cromwellian Officer who garrisoned nearby Carrignaneelagh Castle (1656).

The Toon River marks the northern Parish Boundary – townlands run “rundale-like” South – North on a gradual north-facing slope to the Toon’s clear swift waters that support Pearl Mussel and Otter. But it is to the north of the River where one discovers a wealth of pre-historic man-made enclosures; circular forts and features associated with Bronze Age Agriculture.

Silver Grove, as yet, remains partially clothed in Old Growth Woodland – Sessile Oak with Hazel and Holly under canopy – and a botanical and lichenous wealth associated with long unbroken periods of natural succession woodland.



Kevin surmised along the walk through the fields (whose boundary hedgerows have remained unchanged since the first 19th Century Ordinance), that “farming” came late to Doire Airgid and although the enclosure hedges are likely 200 years old, farming across the river was at least early Bronze Age. Our early farmers cultivated first the south-facing slopes of the river valleys and sunny uplands that supported the necessary glacial till and boulder clays for grazing their herds.

In all, the NPWS has submitted part of Silver Grove and adjoining Townlands of Cooleen (Clunesere East in the 1640-56 Survey) and Cleanrath North to Minister Jimmy Deenihan for designation as a Natural Heritage Area.

Outgoing Chief Scientist (NPWS) John Cross described the proposed 150 acre Reserve as “the finest undesignated Native Woodland in the entire Country” by letter to the Author 2009. Both Kevin and the Author have requested a “Recognition Order” for these precious aboriginal tree’d remnants for 25 years.

Participants imbibed the vista of unbroken Gearagh-like Oak-Sally canopy below us along the Toon – expressing concern at the on-coming Spruce Blocks peeping over the mountain to our northwest – a legacy of the 1906 British Forest model in Ireland.

Large swathes of marginal land were acquired from Upper Lee Valley (including its tributary the Toon) farmers in the 1950’s at £1.00 per acre. The 1956 Forestry Act granted compulsory purchase powers to the then Department of Forestry and Lands – the Author’s research suggests the lands were acquired without the use of the Power. In the Gort (East Galway) catchments, uplands were acquired by the State compulsorily at 10 shillings per acre. (Seven thousand acres at Derrybrien?).

A number of long gone McCarthy Family relations joined our “370 Year Review” and shed more light on their “ancestral Silver Grove” – the presence of additional derelict stone dwellings deep within the re-encroaching Hazels were pointed out – and correspond with the 1842 history maps.



As we gathered in the lower water meadow en route for “refreshments” at their modern (1924) “McCarthy Farmhouse” (known as Moll’s locally) – now occupied and “sustainably” renovated by Toby and Jenny – the garrulous Jays cried out their territorial Vespers from the Woods – it was near the bedtime for Bird and Butterfly – and the Red Squirrel that have their stronghold in the Grove. The first “Leislars” Bat of the evening – audible to some - darted across the crown of a massive coppiced Oak. Honeysuckle and late flowering Meadowsweet amplified their perfumed aerosols – nectar for the “All Ireland” of Moths as continues here in Silver Grove since Erin’s youthful days. In the dead of the night our huge-eared Wood Mouse vanish up the ivied staircases to feast on Acorns and Hazelnuts while Lesser Horseshoe Bats go leor forage for crop pests a few feet from the ground through the open corridors and tracks that criss-cross from heath to water to meadowland to woodland – all night – and return at dawn to their roosts – usually long abandoned and forgotten stone mortar outhouses.

All of Irelands’ 10 Bat Species and their Summer and Winter Roosts are “Strictly Protected” under U.N.; E.U. and Domestic Regulations – their “affordable housing” will soon be placed on a statutory basis via N.H.A. – and their protection strengthened, thankfully.

Toby and Jenny welcome a follow-up event in Heritage Week 2014.

(Author: Teddy Cook)

(Photographs provided courtesy of Pat Fleming)