

NATIONAL TREE WEEK 2015

(Sunday 1st to Sunday 8th March 2015)



Tree Week Events at Macroom's Castle grounds:

Both Sundays of this year's Tree Week were chosen to invite the Community to our 2-Acre Site within Macroom Demesne.

Both Conor O' Callaghan (Masters Student/Arboriculture) and the writer accepted the Trustees' offer to submit a Plan for this "post clearfell" formerly coniferised Site. The same 1970's fashion for Commercial Plantation Forestry can be seen in our National Parks – notably at Coole Park.

This is a Voluntary Project, its' mission being to plant Native Trees of predominantly local provenance. On both Sundays, participants added Downy Birch – Silver Birch's claim to be a common Native 'is now under question' (Daniel Kelly T.C.D.). The Tree Council donated Rowan (Mountain Ash) and Oak (Common). Additionally, we have added Yew (Common), which is intended to represent, with Holly, the main Evergreen understorey. In time, Yew may become co-dominant with Oak, in the canopy.

Our Project runs from March 1st 2014 to March 1st 2017 and we are progressing astride our time constraints.



OLIVE, LADY ARDILAUN:

On a glorious (almost) 8th of March, we gathered (Crinniú = crainn) to commemorate the passing over of Olive, 90 years ago. It was Olive McCarthy Brown, Herbert, Hedge-Eyre, White Guinness that bequeathed the Ancestral Estate, emparked in 1610, to the Town of Macroom. The circumstances of her execution of the Trust in 1924 are well recorded. It is no small responsibility for the successive Trustees to “guard and care for” Olive’s Parkland Trees, many of whom are far advanced in the foothills of middle age.



Our Veteran Tree Tour in the Golf Course (part of the engifted Demesne) included a visit to several “Old Dears” – some Veteran and some Ancient. We applied Prof. Oliver Rackham’s criteria. All show the “War Wounds” of centuries – particularly the huge Pollard Ash within the Conifer Plantation (6.4m circumference at 4 feet). Out of sight – out of mind - one sure safety measure for Trees in great age!



We studied the Double Rank of Beech Avenue flanked by Lime Trees – can this feature be re-constituted or be left to “Decline Management”? Dilemma – learning the “Body Language” of Ancient Trees is a new Script. Prof. Rackham’s Scholarship was largely dedicated to writing the Dictionary and Vocabulary of the Best Practice for our surviving living monuments.



One Ash Tree, blown over in late 1970’s and recently planked, showed 372 rings. Contemplate what ebb and flow in Erin’s fortunes our Ash witnessed – 1641/Cromwell; Elizabethan Settlements; Williamite Land Clearances; the Great Freeze of 1739/1741; the ‘98 Rebellion; the Famine; the Fenians; 1916 and the burning of her Castle of Macroom by Anti-Treaty forces in 1922. Swift describes the Demesne in 1723 during his Munster Travels and Yeats recited his Poetry to Lady Ardilaun.

The writing had been on the wall since Parnell’s rise to Leadership in the British Parliament. Estates were crumbling under the Gladstone Land Acts. As Elizabeth Bowen says – “the door was opening upon a furnace”.

The 700 families that owned 10 million acres of Ireland in 1850 were now reduced to a handful by the early 1920’s. Samuel Beckett’s “All that Fall” encapsulates their utter failure (for some – refusal) to acknowledge the newly emerged dispensation embodied in the Free State by what Yeats called “no petty stock”.

We dedicated Olive’s Oak to her memory – as descendant of Macroom’s oldest Family, through descent from 1411.

In conclusion, we have the record of Lady Ardilaun pleading with the Auxiliaries/Black and Tans on the night of the Kilmichael Ambush, not to burn down Macroom.

2016 looms – many of Ireland’s most beautiful environments are to be found in what were the private gardens of the Elite since the 16th Century. They have become ours to guard and care for because they too have become intrinsic within our Collective Consciousness. We have inherited perhaps the very best of Protestant Ireland – our Political Intelligence; our Literature and our sense of Stewardship towards our surviving Trees and Woodlands.

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Photos by Conor Nelligan