

National Tree Week 2017 – write-up by Ted Cook



Sunday 5th March 2017 – St. Gobnait's Wood Ballyvourney:

With the consent of N.W.P.S. (Wildlife Service) who are charged with the guardianship of St. Gobnait's Wood (S.A.C. Habitats Directive), Ballyvourney, participants gathered at noon on Sunday March 5th 2017 and planted specimen stock of Bird Cherry (*Prunus Padus*), Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*), Spindle (*Euonymous europaeus*) and Hazel (*C.avallana*). Plans are afoot to add a Birch and Aspen linear grove along the banks of the adjoining Sullane River- and add Alder directly within the protected Old Grove Oakwood site. The score or so participants braved torrential rain throughout. Michael and Nora Lucey of Ballymakeera guided the Wood Walk while Wildlife Ranger Dan O'Keefe relayed N.P.W.S. management plans for ongoing sustainable maintenance of this precious Oak remnant. Ted Cook highlighted current research that describes the immediately tangible benefits for our blood pressure when walking in old and stable native woodlands – those significant Indicator plants of the Ground and Field plant storeys and the vast diversity of Fungal lichens and mosses (Bryophyta) were introduced.

The walk continued by the fulacht fiadh (primitive cooking arrangement) on to the early 'Church of Bairneach' Ecclesiastical complex and earlier Iron Age working site – concluding at St. Gobnait's Holy Well and associated Sacred Tree (Crann Bile)



Tuesday 7th March 2017 – Macroom Library and Castle grounds

2017 Tree theme is 'How Can I make a difference?' an extended Tree Week presentation (noon-1.50pm) occurred at Macroom Library. We explored US sixth President's motto 'Alteri seculo' in 1826, meaning 'for other generations'. This Latin motto first appeared in Cicero's wisdom texts (De Senectate), the fuller meaning being 'They who plant trees do so for other generations'.

The same President's father (also John Adams who succeeded A. Lincoln) wrote: 'How can I make a difference- I must study politics and war that my children may read Philosophy and study Mathematics'. Priorities differ in changed times – the past can resemble an alien landscape. 'Alteri seculo' underlines boldly what is required absolutely by this generation of individuals and communities – that efficient ecological services be sustained so that 'Nature and humans do not die off' (R. Steiner, 1912).

In his published research following Hurricane Charlie (Oct 15th 1987), our late Oliver Rackham highlighted two central factors in the hurricane's aftermath across England – painstaking observation and interpretation found that across the early Norman Deer Parks and Parklands, the millions of trees planted 300 years (and more) ago were poorly planted. And that the 'clean up' that followed under Prime Minister's personal direction, inflicted many more times the impact on the receiving environment than Charlie itself. The Army took control of the 'Clearance' – cubic metres of walnut were on offer for ten shillings. Rackham argued that windthrown mature trees and entire blown groves might be left to self-repair. Woodland creatures have not adapted to years of mechanical extraction and associated noise and compaction. Windthrows have mastered 'Biomechanical adjustment' – Rackham tells that a mature hardwood can restore itself with only one-sixth of its rootplate anchored in the land.



'Restraint' which we associate with the English people, was absent during 1987 -1990. If we are to make a difference, we need to heed scholarship lest we lose our know-how to manage our Earth's fragile resources. Pre-occupation with 'The Cult of Appearance' poses unendurable pressures on Earth Ecology says His Holiness, Pope Francis (Laudato encyclical. June 2015). Massive disruption of evolution in our countryside resulted from Rule 5 of the 1995 version of R.E.P.S. (Rural Environmental Protection Scheme) that emphasised 'neatness' and 'appearance' of our field boundaries – farmers were to be penalised for not restricting their hedgerows to 5 feet in height. With few exceptions, our 65 or so native songbirds raise their families above the 2 metre treeline.

Northern Ireland research reckons every driver of a standard car will need to plant and maintain 59 hardwood long-living trees that sequester the released carbon over the average life of the car. A cartoon handout was circulated at the Library talk that depicts 12 functions and benefits of trees that are allowed mature into the foothills of Middle Age. Afterwards a share of participants repaired to the nearby Castlegrounds and hurled their hearts out preparing sites and planting native trees, including Alder, Bird Cherry and Mountain Ash on the north-facing slope (c. 1.7 acres) below Macroom Golf Clubhouse that drains into the Sullane River. The Castle Trustees acknowledge the time and input of the Volunteers that turned up – to make a difference. In all, over the Tuesday (7th) and ensuing Saturday and Sunday (March 11th- 12th) 40 volunteers including children made time to muck in. We planted c. 120 trees, many provided by the Castle Trustees. Silver birch, beech and rowan, were freely provided by Coillte Teo. (Irish State Forestry Board). Yew, hazel, and wild crabapple stock were donated by local growers.