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**Maps and Memoirs:
The Ordnance Survey and Land Use in Ulster, 1824-1840**

When the respondent from the Northwest Farming Society sat down to answer the survey sent to him by the office of the Ordnance Survey, he was less than impressed with the condition of affairs he had to describe. Writing from Templecarn, County Donegal, he was rather worried that the state of nature in Templecarn would reflect poorly on him. “Meagre and dry to the last degree,” he wrote, “must appear the description of a region where the hand of nature, severely parsimonious, has been very niggardly aided by the ingenuity of art or the tasteful design of scientific industry.” There was no doubt that Donegal was beautiful, but it was a useless and unproductive beauty: “Beautiful indeed and picturesque in many places the scenery must appear to the eye of the poet, but when considered in an agricultural, commercial or manufacturing point of view, it presents a spectacle little fitted to captivate the fancy of the theoretical or invite the labours of the practical improver.”¹

This anonymous man’s response encapsulates the goals of the Ordnance Survey. The project began in 1824 and lasted nearly two decades. It was a topographical (rather than cadastral) survey of all of Ireland, conducted with the most up-to-date cartographical instruments and at the detailed scale of six inches to the mile. The directors of the survey wanted the maps to be accompanied by memoirs, or written commentary about the localities, conducted on a parish level. The memoirs were an extraordinarily ambitious undertaking. Surveyors were engineers by training, but they were expected to become ethnographers as well. They received a thirty-

¹ Angelique Day, Patrick McWilliams, and Lisa English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal* (Belfast & Dublin, 1990). 163.

seven page pamphlet to use as their guide; the pamphlet covered natural features and history, ancient and modern topography, the social economy, and the productive economy. The memoirs proved too labor-intensive to complete, however, and data were collected for only eight of Ireland's thirty two counties: Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Monaghan, and Tyrone, all of which are in Ulster.²

A map and its accompanying documents do much more than offer a value-free picture of a geographic space. They are, rather, merely a representation of that space, and the act of creating that representation must be firmly embedded in its social context. Cartography provides a method of systematizing both space and knowledge about the space: the scale, detail, and emphases of a map indicate the culturally-specific important elements of the landscape.³ Some theoreticians argue that maps are primarily about social control, that the close links between the increase in private land ownership and the growing importance of accurate maps indicate cartography has been done by and for the economic elite. Brian Harley extends this, arguing that maps are weapons of imperialism as dangerous as guns and warships. Maps, he says, legitimize conquest by defining the territory on the conquerers' terms.⁴

This relationship between mapping and power is evident in the Ordnance Survey in Ireland. Though the goal was ostensibly to assess the condition of Ireland, the collecting guidelines for the memoirs were designed with English terms and interests in mind. The guidelines and resulting memoirs reveal as much about how the Irish viewed and used their environment as they reveal about English sensibilities. The English were primarily interested in

² J. H. Andrews, *A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Oxford, 1975). 147-153.

³ Daniel Dorling and David Fairbairn, *Mapping: Ways of Representing the World* (1997). 2-6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 66, 73.

“improvements” to the landscape: how effectively and efficiently the Irish were extracting resources from the land. Surveyors described the condition of Irish agriculture, fishing, or manufacturing, then evaluated it against English expectations of what *could* be done with the resources. As the beginning quote indicated, parts of Ireland were severely under-exploited, a condition which induced in some a sense of despair, but inspired others to offer lengthy tracts on what could be done to rectify the situation.

This paper is a case study of county Donegal, detailing how the English surveyors described and evaluated the county. It begins with a recounting of what they saw when they arrived in Donegal, of how the landscape appeared to them. The second section is an analysis of the officers’ commentary on the use of resources in Donegal, and the third is a discussion of the state of Irish manufacturing. This is followed by an investigation of the mystical aspects of the Irish landscape and a discussion of place names in Donegal. The final section of the paper is a brief comparison to county Antrim, a more populated and industrial county. The image of Ulster that emerges from this study is one of tremendous beauty, quaint customs, and vast areas of untapped resources. The English observers see the most room for change in isolated and rural Donegal, but offer suggestions for improvement in Antrim as well.

Donegal was recognized by nearly all surveyors to be quite beautiful; they routinely described the vistas they encountered. It was a land of jagged coastlines, rugged mountains, studded with lakes and bogs, and crisscrossed with rivers. The Presbyterian minister in Kilmacrenan described the parish as “grand, romantic, and picturesque.”⁵ The officer who visited the parish of Clondavaddog was struck by the breathtaking views of hills, bays, clouds, mountains and crags, writing that “The entrance into [the peninsula of Fanad] from Milford by

⁵ Angelique Day, Patrick McWilliams, and Lisa English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 38: Parishes of County Donegal I, 1833-5, North-east Donegal* (Belfast & Dublin, 1990). 50.

the bank of Mulroy is considered in the country to be a sight worthy of going many miles to see.”⁶ The scenery in Desertegney, on the eastern shore of Lough Swilly [the largest lake in Donegal], said the officer there, “is strikingly wild and bold.”⁷ Not all visitors agreed that the landscape of mountains, lakes, and bogs was agreeable. An officer in Templecarn lamented that the landscape was “wild and unpromising.” He continued that it contained too many lakes and bogs with little cultivable land: “There are no less than 110 loughs in the parish. They present no picturesque features but rather blend to the general gloom of its mountain districts.”⁸

Extensive woodlands, a feature of the landscape the English expected to be there, were lacking. There was evidence of woodlands, in place names and timber in bogs, but the trees themselves had long been cut down, for fuel or military purposes. Properly maintained woods, however, were a necessary element of a complete landscape. What stands of trees there were had been planted around “gentlemen’s seats,” or residences of local (usually Protestant) gentry. In Mintiaghs, also called Bar of Inch, the only woods were composed of relatively young trees and surrounded Mr. Harvey’s house, and Mr. Harvey was the only Protestant in the area.⁹ Trees, according to the English surveyors, added considerably to the landscape. In Tullyaughnish, for example, ‘the Reverend Mr. Hart has planted a considerable number of acres [of trees] about his house and demesne, where the abrupt rocky steps of Glenalla rise at high angles, and, being

⁶ Ibid. 6.

⁷ Ibid. 27.

⁸ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 161.

⁹ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 38: Parishes of County Donegal I, 1833-5, North-east Donegal*. 65-66.

judiciously embellished with trees, has rendered his estate decidedly the most finished place in the neighborhood.”¹⁰

If the lack of woods was aesthetically displeasing, the lack of fences was downright inexplicable. Farms in Donegal tended to be quite small; the average size was less than fifteen acres of unenclosed land. The primary crop was potatoes, though most farmers grew barely, flax, and oats as well. Farmers still used the traditional run and dale (sometimes called rundale) method of land distribution, which precluded the use of fences. Rundale farming was tied closely with *clachan* or *baile* living. Families lived in cottages clustered together, usually in the center of a large fertile field. The field itself was divided into strips based on soil type and productivity. Each family worked specific strips, and the strips themselves were redistributed periodically based on changes in family size or soil productivity. The goal was to allocate to each family enough farmland to support itself, without concentrating the best land in the hands of a minority of people. There could be no fences in this system, since both the plot sizes and the people entitled to use those plots changed on a regular basis. Furthermore, the small and irregularly shaped plots lent themselves to spade, rather than plow, cultivation.¹¹ Rundale incensed observers to a considerable degree, more so than any other Irish tradition, including illicit distilling. Fumed a writer in Raymoghly, “It is evident to everyone who examines the present state of the country that no effective improvement can be expected to take place until the terribly barbarous custom of what is called rundale is totally abolished.”¹² The Reverend Henry Maturin in Clondavaddog echoed the frustration with rundale, declaring, “No hopes of any great

¹⁰ Ibid. 85.

¹¹ Kevin Whelan, "Pre and Post-Famine Landscape Change," in *The Great Irish Famine*, ed. Cathal Poirteir (Dublin, 1995). 23.

¹² Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 141.

improvement can be looked for until run and dale ceases. The people by this vicious system are congregated in thick villages and the country left entirely without fences.”¹³

The English obsession with fences was partly philosophical and aesthetic, and partly practical. They thought fenced fields simply looked better because they regularized the landscape. Where landlords had fenced, English observers noted this approvingly. Mr. Noonan in Clondavaddog provided his tenants with new houses and fenced holdings, but the remainder of the parish remained plagued by rundale.¹⁴ In the parish of Donegal, wrote the surveyor, “formerly the farmers used to cultivate the most convenient part of his land and enclose it whether regular or not. Now the farms are enclosed in neat parks of about two acres with straight regular ditches.”¹⁵ Fences, for English settlers and observers in both the New World and the Old, were a necessary feature of an “improved” or subdued landscape. Fences were a signal that the land was owned privately, farmed extensively, and used exclusively.¹⁶

Fences served a very practical purpose as well: that of keeping grazing animals and tilled crops separate. Cows and sheep, and sometimes even horses, roamed freely across the landscape, trampling and eating crops unless herded by hired boys. The respondent in Raymoghly noted that “[f]rom the first week in November to the latter end of April the entire face of the country resembles a great common where cows, horses and sheep graze promiscuously.”¹⁷

¹³ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 38: Parishes of County Donegal I, 1833-5, North-east Donegal*. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 6.

¹⁵ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 53.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the use of fences in New England, see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983), especially page 73.

¹⁷ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 141.

Writers described this across Donegal, and the “state of nature with respect to enclosures” baffled them. It seemed more efficient to the officer in Conleigh to feed grazing animals in stalls rather than send them out to pasture: farmers could collect the manure to use as fertilizer on tilled crops.¹⁸

Some farmers, of course, did use fences. Wealthier men could afford to use stone, but many, poorer, farmers had to be content with wide banks made of mud or manure. These fences were irresponsible, worse than leaving land unenclosed, and dangerous as well. An officer wrote of fencing in Killea and Taughboyne,

The description of fence used by the intelligent and those of circumstance is either hawthorn hedges or stone walls, but the other class must be content without any fence or let the useless, I may say pernicious, banks of mud or manure which their forefathers had raised remain, many of which betwixt cultivated land and crop are 6, 7, or 8 yards asunder. Surely such a stupid waste of land, and that probably of the best quality, stands highly reprehensible.¹⁹

He continued that farmers had “better and cheaper” fencing options, and using these unspecified alternatives would benefit the farmers as well as tourists. More land, probably of very high quality due to years of fertilization, would be available for cultivation. Furthermore, filling in the trenches that accompanied the banks would “secure travelers from the danger of being swallowed up alive in the deceitful and illegal trenches.”²⁰ This was not a universal opinion, however. The respondent in Killymard agreed that stone fences were the most desirable, but only if the land was dry and stones are plentiful. “In wet lands,” however, “a double ditch with a deep trench in each side of the ditch, sown with broom or furze or quickset closely with

¹⁸ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 38: Parishes of County Donegal I, 1833-5, North-east Donegal*. 34 ,Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 5

¹⁹ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 81.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 81.

hawthorn, forms the best fence and affords a shelter which is of the utmost consequence to both the crop and the grazing cattle.” He continued that “fences of this description assist in draining land.”²¹

Farming techniques were primitive to English eyes as well. Few farmers could afford plows and draft animals, which were useless on small, rocky, irregularly shaped holdings; most cultivated with spades or harrows. Land was sometimes brought under cultivation using scoring and burning, but this provided fertile land for only two or three growing seasons.²² Farmers across Donegal preferred to use seaweed as fertilizer; it was usually inexpensive if not free, and it ensured luxuriant potato crops, the staple of the peasants’ diet. Residents near Lough Swilly encouraged its growth near the shore by studding the beaches with rocks, which trapped the seaweed in areas easy to harvest it. It was so valued as fertilizer that it was gathered communally and shared “by established rules that must not be violated.”²³ All in all, the English officers of the Ordnance Survey took a dim view of the state of agriculture in Donegal; one in Kilmacrenan concluded that “[t]heir modes of agriculture are wretched, owing partly to their poverty and much to their sloth.”²⁴

The English did not lack for suggestions and remedies. First and foremost, the local small farmers needed good examples to follow. Landlords were usually absentee, and so the tenants had no one to show them improved agricultural techniques. The officers of the Survey were quite confident that a proper example set by resident landlords would offer a quick remedy:

²¹ Ibid. 103.

²² Ibid. 75.

²³ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 38: Parishes of County Donegal I, 1833-5, North-east Donegal*. 127-128.

²⁴ Ibid. 52.

“The people in general are very well disposed to be industrious but they have no encouragement. There are no resident gentlemen to employ the labourers, to inspire the farmers by his advice or more powerful example.”²⁵ Failing the presence of a landlord, a Scottish farmer was the next best thing, and the author of the memoir in Inishkeel declared that if a Scotch farmer settled in the parish, “much good would result from it.”²⁶ The memoirs provide a few examples of so-called improving landlords, though the good example the landlord set may or may not have been followed by his tenantry; the author of the memoir simply assumed that it was beneficial. The case of Mr. James Ball is an example. He owned a large farm, “where he sets an example of an improved mode of agriculture and care of improving the breed of cattle which cannot fail to be useful to the landholders in his vicinity.”²⁷ The memoir does not indicate if the improved farming techniques and improved cattle were actually adopted or useful, but the author had faith that it would not be otherwise. The model farm owned by Colonel Pratt and run by his steward was a more clear-cut example: his “barren moor” became “valuable pasture” through irrigation.²⁸

Short leases and small plots were identified as other, significant problems inhibiting the productivity of agriculture in Donegal. R. Rogers, the Presbyterian minister in Donagh, thought that such conditions induced the tenants to farm cash crops and subsist on potatoes. “This, I can see, is a principle reason why our country has such a naked and, were it not for the cabins, dispersed through, a deserted look,” he wrote. He continued

But would the landlords divide their lands into respectable farms of 20 or 30 acres each, give long listings, give encouragement to enclose, reclaim, drain, and plant, would they

²⁵ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 144.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 67.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 117.

visit their lands once or twice a year, show their tenants that they have an interest in their prosperity, labour would take a new direction, the morals of the people improved, indolent and illegal habits banished, and change the preconceived tyranny of their landlords into the full conviction of his being their friend and benefactor.²⁹

If perhaps Reverend Rogers was overly sanguine about the benefits of a resident gentry, his exhortations to consolidate and enclose holdings, and to extend the limits of cultivable land, echoed what the other authors of the memoirs suggested to improve agriculture in Donegal.

Fishing was similarly underexploited. The lakes and rivers of Donegal were usually teeming with trout or salmon or eels, and the North Atlantic had fish there for the taking. English surveyors thought it obvious that those on the coast would subsist on seafood, but that was rarely the case.³⁰ The respondent in Culdaff unintentionally summed up the attitude of Donegal residents when he answered “yes” to the question, “Is fishing a favourite pursuit of the people or is it uncongenial to their habits and feelings?”³¹ Many men did fish, but they did so to supplement their farm produce rather than as the primary source of income. They neglected the more profitable deep sea fishing because their boats were unsuited for it, and safe harbors were few and far between. Officers of the Ordnance Survey in the parish of Desertegney observed that “[t]he deep sea fishing is now the most profitable, and would doubtless succeed better if good decked smacks were employed which could stand the open sea, but the crazy boats in use are unfitted for any wind.”³²

Just as they had suggestions to improve agriculture, the Ordnance Survey officers offered ways to improve the profitability of fishing in Donegal, especially fishing in Lough Swilly. The

²⁹ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 38: Parishes of County Donegal I, 1833-5, North-east Donegal*. 34.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 61.

³¹ *Ibid.* 21.

³² *Ibid.* 29.

obvious solution was to make “a few small improvements of their boat harbours [e.g., removing rocks] [which] would prepare them to give full scope to all their enterprise and industry in fishing and give the surrounding country a very large and welcome supply of wholesome food.”³³ This would also have the added benefit of curbing illegal distillation, as the year-round abundance of fish would induce fishermen to fish rather than distill. In perhaps a fit of over-optimism, Mr. Montgomery of the Survey wrote, “I trust that the bare mention of it will stir every Irishman to join his fellow Irishmen in offering unanimous and irresistible solicitations for the means of accomplishing so desirable an object.”³⁴

There was, in fact, fishing in Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle, the two biggest lakes in Donegal, and the memoirs do indicate this. In one case, they mention a conflict between fishermen and farmers. Farmers were in the habit of harvesting the sweet grass on the edges of the lakes as fodder for their animals. Fishermen deplored this practice and were demanding a law against harvesting it in the spring. They claimed that the harvests destroyed fish populations because the fry of some fish matured in the grasses, and premature harvesting killed the fry.³⁵ In another case, the memoirs indicate tension between subsistence and commercial fishermen over the use of long lines. Small fishermen complained that the use of long lines with hundreds of hooks in Lough Foyle damaged fishing there. These lines were about 960 yards long and contained 300 hooks. They had caught at least thirty to forty fish each time they were checked. Subsistence fishermen maintained that the fish refuse to take bait after they have been caught by, but escaped from, the long lines. The author of the report is not convinced that the long lines are

³³ Ibid. 133-134.

³⁴ Ibid. 136, 138.

³⁵ Ibid. 139.

detrimental to fishing at all, stating, “I cannot imagine why one of the many hooks of a long line, and when all are concealed with their baits, should be more likely to wound a fish attempting to seize it than a singly-baited hook hung to a hand line, when attempted to be seized by that or any other fish.”³⁶

Fishing, then, was practiced in Donegal, and a “death-like silence” did not “pervade [the] shores” of Lough Swilly.³⁷ It was simply not conducted to the extent that the English thought the environment could bear and the market would support. The Donegal fishermen were content to fish part-time in good weather and tend their fields otherwise, but the English would have preferred large-scale commercial enterprises, with boats seaworthy in deep water and the harbors to accommodate them. The lack of such infrastructure was a waste, and, according to Mr. Montgomery, “we cannot consider the circumstance without regret.”³⁸

Proper land use was something one learned through contemplation rather than practice, according to one officer of the Survey. He states that “It is a truth that agriculture is a science which requires the attention of the philosopher and too refined for the researches of the farmer, whose ideas are so limited by the usual labour of his forefathers without making himself acquainted with the different kinds of earths and cultivation proper for each.”³⁹ The farmers in Donegal were most definitely not scientists. Though there were schools in the county, and most children could read, few people had any substantial education.

³⁶ Ibid. 139-140.

³⁷ Ibid. 85.

³⁸ Ibid. 133-134.

³⁹ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 148.

In addition to farming and fishing, the authors of the memoirs were concerned to describe the state of manufacturing in Ireland. They found that in Donegal, the linen trade was the most widespread industry, though it was declining in some areas. Most parishes had some spinners and weavers, though a depression in the linen trade had limited their activities. Since fuel was limited and expensive (and needed for heat), widespread manufacture was difficult, and linen production remained a cottage industry.⁴⁰

The English also looked for evidence of or opportunities for mining. They learned there was a silver mine in Donagh producing good ore until about fifty years ago, but “no reason can be assigned why it was relinquished.” There was another silver mine in Inishkeel, but, like the one in Donagh, it was not worked.⁴¹

The memoirs indicate another layer to the landscape in Donegal. The Irish certainly exploited the land’s resources, if not to the extent the English thought desirable, but there was also a supernatural element to the environment. Holy wells dotted the countryside, their water offering cures for various ailments. Some were ancient and falling into disuse, such as St. Columb’s well in Clonmany. It was ‘visited by the people on the 8th of June, but the practice is falling into decay,’ wrote the respondent in the parish of Clonmany.⁴² Others were discovered more recently, including the one in Carrick, where Roman Catholics visited to pray for cures of

⁴⁰ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 38: Parishes of County Donegal I, 1833-5, North-east Donegal*. 8, 27, 43, 49; Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 10, 50, 150.

⁴¹ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 38: Parishes of County Donegal I, 1833-5, North-east Donegal*. 31; Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 70.

⁴² Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 38: Parishes of County Donegal I, 1833-5, North-east Donegal*. 15.

sore eyes and pains.⁴³ The holy well underneath Down Rock in Kilmacrenan, according to the officer there, had uses too numerous to mention, though it was well known as a guard against unfaithful husbands.⁴⁴ The more sophisticated visited the spa in Druimros, where they could soak in a mineral bath filled by a pump. The water from the spring was known to help the unlikely combination of “bowl and cutaneous complaints, and is frequented in the summer for these and other diseases.”⁴⁵

Many peasants thought they shared their country side with fairies and other mythical creatures. Lismullyduff was a trigonometrical station for the English, but, according to the memoir writer in Donaghmore, it “is supposed by the inhabitants to be a haunt of the fairies, and the sound of musical instruments and merriment [is] often heard there.”⁴⁶ Fairies regularly appeared to Cauhall Sharkey of Tullaghobegley, who claimed to see “the most splendid theatre of the fairy tribe.” They were not “wee folk,” according to Mr. Sharkey, but the same size as people. He last saw them sixteen months before the memoir was written.

Non-human-like creatures resided in lakes. In Repentance, in the parish of Donaghmore, “there is in the lough a kind of amphibious animal as large as a young heifer.” A man named Byrne saw it one night, and it scared him. His son saw it the next night and resolved to kill it, but he froze at the last minute, and the creature escaped. It had not been seen since, “but when

⁴³ Ibid. 34.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 152.

⁴⁵ Day, McWilliams, and English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 39: Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West, and South Donegal*. 95.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 34.

the lough is frozen, wild and tremendous howling is heard beneath the ice, which these people suppose to be the ‘dorhagh’, as they call it.”⁴⁷

Legends exist to explain other natural phenomena as well. For example, there were few salmon in Lough Derg. People “religiously believed” the local legend that St. Patrick banished the fish after a large salmon tripped him as he was wading to Saint’s Island in the middle of the lake. But, according to the writer of the memoir, “[t]he absence of salmon from Lough Derg is not difficult to be accounted for: the shores are studded with low rocks in almost every part and very little gravel is met with for the fish to spawn in.”⁴⁸

The Ordnance Survey surveyors thought these customs quaint at best, and utterly ridiculous at worst. One such surveyor in Glencolumbkille heard many legends and stories about St. Columb, but did not enumerate very many of them, declaring that “[t]he traditions respecting Columbkille are very numerous indeed but in general too ridiculous to mention.” One, which he did mention, he described with a faint hint of mockery: that of St. Columb’s stone. “There is,” he said, “a stone of very particular use in curing headaches which must be lodged every night in St. Columb’s Bed [located in St. Columb’s House, near his well], but is generally taken off every morning through the parish. I was not fortunate enough to see it though I called twice, but each time it was out on duty.”⁴⁹

Some of the place names in Donegal stem from local legends. Glencolumbkille is an example: the valley of St. Columb. Other place names have pagan, rather than Christian, origins. The townland and lake of Trusk in the parish of Donaghmore “are said to have been named after

⁴⁷ Ibid. 34.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 161.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 64-65.

a giant whose grave is shown on the western side of the lough.”⁵⁰ Some place names are purely descriptive, such as Killymard. Killy is probably a bastardization of *coil*, Irish for “a wood” and *ard*, Irish for “high portions.” The English took this to mean that the area had once been thickly forested, though the trees had long since disappeared. Other names were a combination of Irish descriptions and local legends, however infamous they may be. In the parish of Tullaghobegley was a village called Thoar McBride. *Thoar* is Irish for bush, tower, or pyramid, and there is in fact a large stone on top of a small hill near the village. McBride is taken from the story of a young man named McBride who took a local girl to the rock, promising to show her a spectacular view. Once they were atop the rock, though, he raped her.⁵¹

The memoirs of the Ordnance Survey found Donegal to be a beautiful, if under-exploited area. They were optimistic that the county could be made to turn a profit in farming and fishing if only the residents would enact the improvements the English suggested. Farm holdings needed to be regularized and fenced, animals needed to be stalled or grazed only in land unfit for agriculture, harbors dredged, and mines sunk. The residents of Donegal were lazy, whether by circumstance or proclivity the English were undecided, but in either case could be encouraged through the good example of resident landlords. How did Donegal compare to other parts of Ulster?

I’ve chosen for this study to use County Antrim as a brief point of comparison. Antrim is the county surrounding the city of Belfast, and so it is much less isolated than is Donegal. It is also rather close to Scotland and was settled in the Early Modern period by many lowland Scots. The English stated several times in the memoirs of Donegal that the presence of Scottish farmers

⁵⁰ Ibid. 34.

⁵¹ Ibid. 94, 172.

would greatly improve the state of affairs there; did a relatively Scottish population make a difference in Antrim?

The answer is a qualified yes. The Scots colonized an uncultivated landscape, and to this, according to the observer in Ballyrobert, “may be attributed all the subsequent improvements which have taken place in the country” such as low rents and long leases. The improvements, however, were not as rapid as might have been expected, owing to the situation which plagued all of Ireland: there was “no resident gentleman to set an example.”⁵² The officer in Ballywalter, however, was more confident that the Scottish settlers, with their Protestantism (if only Presbyterianism), education, and respect for property, were on their own a force for improvement, however sporadic, in Ulster. He wrote:

The colonisation of this country by a peaceful and industrious people, the establishment of religious congregations and regular clergy, the subsequent introduction of schools, the construction of good roads and the enjoyment of property in the peace and security which ensued the few troublesome years after their settlement, have been the causes of all the subsequent improvements which have from time to time affected this grange.⁵³

Antrim was significantly more developed than Donegal, and observers did not hesitate to attribute that to the Scottish backgrounds of the residents in Antrim.

The improvements they made to the landscape more than compensated for its lack of natural interest. In Ballymartin, wrote the officer there, the scenery, “though not actually interesting, is pleasing and agreeable. There is but little diversity in the surface of the ground and there is scarcely a tree, but on the other hand its broad smooth slopes are all under cultivation of a respectable state.” He went on to clarify that “the fields are large and the fences

⁵² Angelique Day, Patrick McWilliams, and Lisa English, eds., *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Vol. 2: The Parishes of County Antrim (i), 1938-9* (Belfast & Dublin, 1990).

⁵³ *Ibid.* 29.

and hedgerows are rather neat and regular.” It was, he decided, a “cheerful fertile countryside.”⁵⁴ Land in Ballyrobert may have lacked the fertility that pockets of Donegal had, but it was certainly better cared for. Land here, it was understood, was a resource to be managed and manipulated, and the respondent wrote that “the country bears the appearance, if not of fertility, at least of good husbandry, the fields being square and better enclosed, and more neatly and profitably cultivated and drained.”⁵⁵ The residences of the farmers in Antrim conformed more accurately to what the English considered a proper house. The plots were large, cottages were “neat and substantial,” and surrounded by trees.⁵⁶

Antrim was not isolated as Donegal was. There were several well-maintained roads running through Antrim leading to urban centers such as Belfast, Antrim, Carrickfergus, and Kells.⁵⁷ The proximity to significant markets allowed industry in Antrim to flourish. In the parish of Carnmoney, for example, farmers devoted their land to pasturage for dairy cows, and the area supplied Belfast with butter and buttermilk.⁵⁸ As in Donegal, however, local industry was in a depression. There were a dozen looms for weaving linen in Ballywalter, but they had fallen into disuse because there was no market for the cloth. Carnmoney boasted cotton and flax mills in addition to a log mill, and in neighboring Shankhill, cotton manufacturing had thrived. It was introduced in 1786, leading to massive employment and high wages in spinning and printing, which in turn led to increased production of local products and more investment in agriculture. This happy cycle was coming to an end as the memoirs were being produced,

⁵⁴ Ibid. 4-5.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 22.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 29.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 19-20, 29.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 58.

however, because the cotton manufacturing in Antrim was declining due to the introduction of steam, cotton imports from Manchester, and combination among the printers. There had also been an “extensive printing establishment” in Mallusk, though that too had fallen into disuse over the past few years.⁵⁹

Despite its modernity, the supernatural element of the landscape was alive in Antrim. The officer in Ballymartin stated that the belief in “ghosts, fairies and enchantments” was firm among both young and old. Carnmoney, the home of so many mills, was also “remarkably superstitious” and home to twenty-three gentle bushes (fairy haunts). Others pointed out that the belief was not as strong as it appeared at first. Ballymartin, for example, did contain a holy well thought to be good for rheumatism. The people who used it, though, did so very self-consciously. Two old Presbyterians were the only ones in the parish who used it, but they denied doing so to avoid being labeled as superstitious. The respondent in Ballywalter found little superstition, attributing it to the Protestantism of its residents; the lack was “chiefly owing to its inhabitants being Presbyterian and somewhat enlightened and rather intelligent.”⁶⁰

The English authors of the Ordnance Survey memoirs found certain characteristics common both rural and more industrial parts of Ulster. Manufacturing was declining across the area, due to increased competition from abroad, and the landscape contained supernatural elements that residents recognized with more or less enthusiasm. Donegal and Antrim diverged, however, with respect to exploiting the land. Farmers in Donegal did not use the resources which their environment provided with nearly enough efficiency to satisfy English observers. The memoirs of Donegal are full of suggestions for improving, or intensifying, land use. These

⁵⁹ Ibid. 26, 36, 51-52, 107.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 11, 12, 26, 63, 99.

range from the relatively low-tech suggestion to build fences, to the complex and expensive suggestion that fishermen dredge deeper harbors and buy sturdier boats so they could practice deep sea fishing year-round. Antrim looked more like a well-ordered countryside should. Grazing animals and crops were separated, cottages were shaded by trees, and farmers in Antrim were fortunate enough to have nearby markets in which to sell their produce. The Ordnance Survey memoirs offer tremendous insight into both land use in Ulster, and the English expectations for the Ulster environment.

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The Ordnance Memoir of Ireland was a projected 1830s topography of Ireland to be published alongside the maps of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland using materials gathered by surveyors as they traversed the country. The project was cancelled in 1840 as too expensive and beyond the survey's original scope. Material gathered before the cancellation mostly covers Ulster. Much was eventually published in the later twentieth century. The memoirs are a useful primary source for local history and genealogy of... Civilian staff praised the Ordnance Survey and expressed pride in being part of it. Their only complaints, repeated and consistent, were about money. One young recruit, John Keegan, kept a diary of his experiences as an assistant surveyor. He paid people before setting marks on their land, he never carried firearms, and he always explained how the survey would benefit people. Unlike Edgeworth, David Aher, a civil engineer employed as a tithe commissioner, encountered great hostility and was repeatedly prevented from surveying. Just as the intelligentsia praised Ordnance Survey maps, they promoted the memoirs as having the potential to advance scholarship, and to provide essential practical information on natural resources, social and economic conditions. The Ordnance Survey of Ireland was established in 1824. The survey was intended to facilitate a uniform valuation for taxation purposes. Information that could not be fitted onto the survey maps was provided in an accompanying series of aide memoirs or simply "memoirs". These descriptions represent a snapshot in time of the Ulster Scots and Irish communities and while the Victorian commentary may appear discriminatory and pejorative to the modern reader they are an invaluable window into Irish history. The memoirs have been transcribed by the Institute of Irish Studies at the Queens University of Belfast from the original records held by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) and were published in 1993 as an extensive series in hardback and softback. [2]. In 1824 a detailed valuation of land and buildings was being planned as a preliminary to the reform of Ireland's local taxation system. Initially the O.S. had hoped to accompany the maps with parish memoirs recording geology, botany, local history, economic and statistical data. Unfortunately this ambitious project was abandoned in 1840 with three of the four provinces almost untouched and only one memoir, that for the parish of Templemore, County Derry, published. Most of the memoir collections refer to the historic province of Ulster and the manuscript material is now being published by the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast.