



Our Remarkable **trees**

A Selection of Northern Ireland's Special Trees



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A selection of Northern Ireland's special trees

Compiled by Dinah Browne

Photographs by Mike Hartwell



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland



ENVIRONMENT
AND HERITAGE
SERVICE



THE FOREST OF
BELFAST



THE
NATIONAL
TRUST



FOREST SERVICE

Cover picture: The Dark Hedges, an avenue of beech trees near Mosside, Co Antrim.

FOREWORD

This book celebrates some of the biggest, tallest, broadest plants in Northern Ireland..... Our trees. Some are champions in size, great giants among their peers. Others are loved landmarks in the landscape, others interwoven with particular people, historic events or folklore. Trees help create a distinctive "sense of place". They are an integral part of the character and identity of any locality. The trees growing in any given location evoke powerful links with the culture and history of an area, whether descended from our once vast natural forest or planted by man to serve his needs.

Through them we are connected in a very real way to our local environment. Those included in this book are only a few among many that could have been featured. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list but rather an inspiration and encouragement to everyone to look again at the trees they know and to take a fresh look at new trees. There are so many more out there that deserve recognition and need to be recorded.

We want you, the readers, to tell us about the trees you feel are remarkable. Either phone us at the Millennium Tree Campaign Advice Line 0845 6030472, email us at cvni@btcv.org.uk, write to us at The Millennium Tree Campaign, Beech House, 159 Ravenhill Road, Belfast, BT6 0BP or post a message on our Website www.btcv.org.uk/cvni

We also want to encourage a sense of continuity, to build upon the distinctive sense of place that trees help create. To achieve this we want people to gather seeds from your own favourite trees and to grow the seeds into new trees that you can plant back into the landscape so that future generations can continue to enjoy what we are able to enjoy. Our previous publication "Our Trees. A Guide to Growing Northern Ireland's Native Trees from Seed" will help you in this process. A copy can be obtained from Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland, Dendron Lodge, Clandeboye Estate, Bangor Co Down BT191RN.

Individual action, no matter how small, does make a difference. This is the essence of the UK and Ireland wide Trees of Time and Place Project. You can participate in practical action to conserve our tree heritage by celebrating, recording and then caring for the trees you have found and also participate in increasing our tree population by planting young trees grown from seeds you have collected. Why not join us in this campaign to conserve and increase our tree heritage throughout the whole of Northern Ireland.

Please remember that if trees are on private land you need permission for access to them.

John McClean

Director Conservation Volunteers
& Chair of the Trees of Time & Place Steering Group.



landmark
trees

A landmark tree is one which gives an immediate sense of place, of recognition. Such trees may have been planted deliberately, some may be survivors of a larger tree group or of woodland. They may be solitary trees, or form part of a group or avenue.

THE FROSSES PINES

Travelling along the roads of Northern Ireland, certain trees or groups are immediately recognisable. On the road north from Ballymena heading for Ballymoney or Ballycastle, are some of the most loved pine trees. They line the road on both sides in two sections and stand like sentinels, overlooking the roadway.

The pines are growing in boggy ground, vegetation dominated by heather. They have developed a leaning growth over the road, perhaps to compensate for shrinkage of the ground beside the road which is now raised above the surrounding land, or the weight of the road surface.

Pines were traditionally planted to sign safe tracks through boggy ground, and probably marked the route of this road before it was given a modern hard surface. One suggestion was that the roots meet under the road, and help to hold it up. These were planted in 1840 by the great Sir Charles Lanyon, architect and engineer.

In spite of the general affection in which these pines are held, their future is by no means certain when road widening is expected.



The cattle lawn, Balmoral. (Photograph courtesy of R.U.A.S.)

The Greenmount copper beech



FARMER'S TREES

Some trees are evocative of time and place for a particular time of life or special event. Student days for many young farmers are associated with agricultural colleges: Enniskillen and Loughry have fine trees, but the most mentioned tree was the copper beech at Greenmount.

There were two copper beech, both planted when the original house was built in the 1820s. One by the nature trail fell a few years ago and a replacement has been planted.

Beyond college life, farming has its special days, and the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society Summer Show at Balmoral is one of the best.

The cattle lawn is a lovely place especially on a fine sunny day, when its rows of trees provide welcome shade as well as shelter and a picturesque backdrop to the cattle judging. The trees are a mix of species including lime and horse chestnut.

TREE TUNNELS

Roadside trees can form complete tunnels, meeting in an archway over the carriageway. The lower twigs are kept trimmed by lorries passing underneath. Beech are much used for hedges in South Antrim, often planted above a stone wall in a hedge and bank style.

They line one section of the road near Dundrod, used as a route from Belfast to Aldergrove airport (and Nutt's Corner, in the past) before the M2. In high summer they cast a dense shade over the road which appears to dive into a deep green tunnel before the view opens over level land and Lough Neagh.

Taller beech form a wonderful high tunnel over the road at Knockloughrim, Co. Londonderry. The road is an alternative route to the Castledawson by-pass, connecting the main road north of Toomebridge with the road over the Glenshane pass.

One special stretch of roadside trees, thought to be one of the longest, has just been recognised by a Tree Preservation Order - 1.5km along the road from Tempo to Fivemiletown. In places, both sides have trees: one side borders the estate of Tempo Manor which is private but many of its splendid trees may be seen from this stretch of road.

The Dark Hedges are two rows of spectacular beech trees opposite Gracehill House near Mosside in Co Antrim. It was a popular walk for courting couples despite stories of it being haunted. There is a belief that anxious fathers maintained this haunted myth to keep their daughters away.

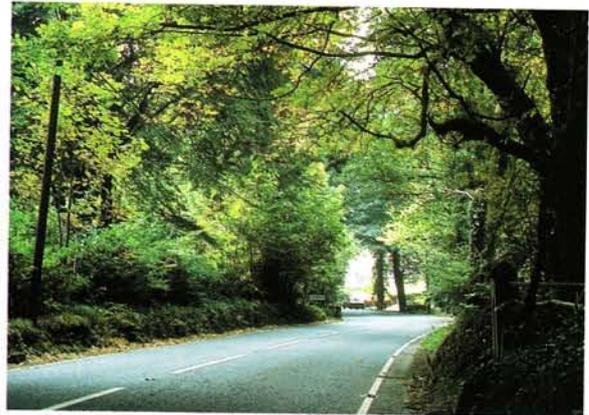
Allan Davies' photograph won him the 1995 Ulster TV Amateur Photographer of the Year competition.



Dundrod beech avenue



Knockloughrim, Co L'derry



Tempo, Co Fermanagh



The Dark Hedges, Co Antrim. Photograph by Allan Davies.

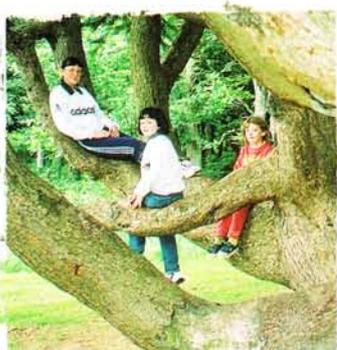
AN AVENUE OF CEDARS



The avenue leading into Tollymore Forest Park in Co Down must be one of the best known sights of Northern Ireland's forests.

The two rows of lovely Deodar Cedar with their various shapes of trunk and branches provide a grand approach to Tollymore, most visited of all the forest parks. As the avenue of cedars ends, there is a road junction beside which stands

what is probably the largest of Tollymore's oak trees, just 20' in girth. There are other fine oaks, with beeches and ancient yews, throughout the woodland down by the Shimna River, and more fine yews by the car park, in the arboretum and beside the exit road - no shortage of them !





people's
trees

Some trees are champions in their own right, some are famous by association with a person or an event, some may have both distinctions. Royalty and foresters, preachers and gardeners may all be remembered by special trees.

KING WILLIAM'S CHESTNUT

The link between King William and sweet chestnut is strongest at Scarva House in County Down. In front stands a magnificent sweet chestnut, larger than the Cranmore trees and slightly younger. The story is that when King William stayed here his horse put a foot on the young tree (suggesting that it was newly planted in 1690), this caused it to spread rather than grow vertically. Its trunk is only about a metre high where it divides into vast branches, growing out and up. Some of these giant limbs are dead - one has been lopped, one is propped up on a pole, but another 'bald' one is still putting out healthy live shoots.

Other branches thrive with excellent leaf cover, and new young growth sprouts from the base of the venerable trunk. This tree may look half dead, but the greater part is very much alive and appears all set for hundreds of years to come. Scarva House is private. The tree is seen by disparate groups - those seriously involved with horses, and those who gather for the 'mock battle' on July 13th each year, a re-play of the Battle of the Boyne. There are other trees named after King William and his army, such as the 'Royal Oak' outside Lisnaskea - and there must be more....



BELFAST'S OLDEST CHESTNUTS

Cranmore, Belfast, is the site of some of the oldest chestnuts - sweet or Spanish chestnut *Castanea sativa*.

They are just off the Malone Road next to school playing fields owned by the Royal Belfast Academical Institution (Inst). The school was founded on the inspiration of a Belfast man, John Templeton, who

is perhaps better known as the founder of natural history study here, a man with a wide knowledge of Ulster and its flora.



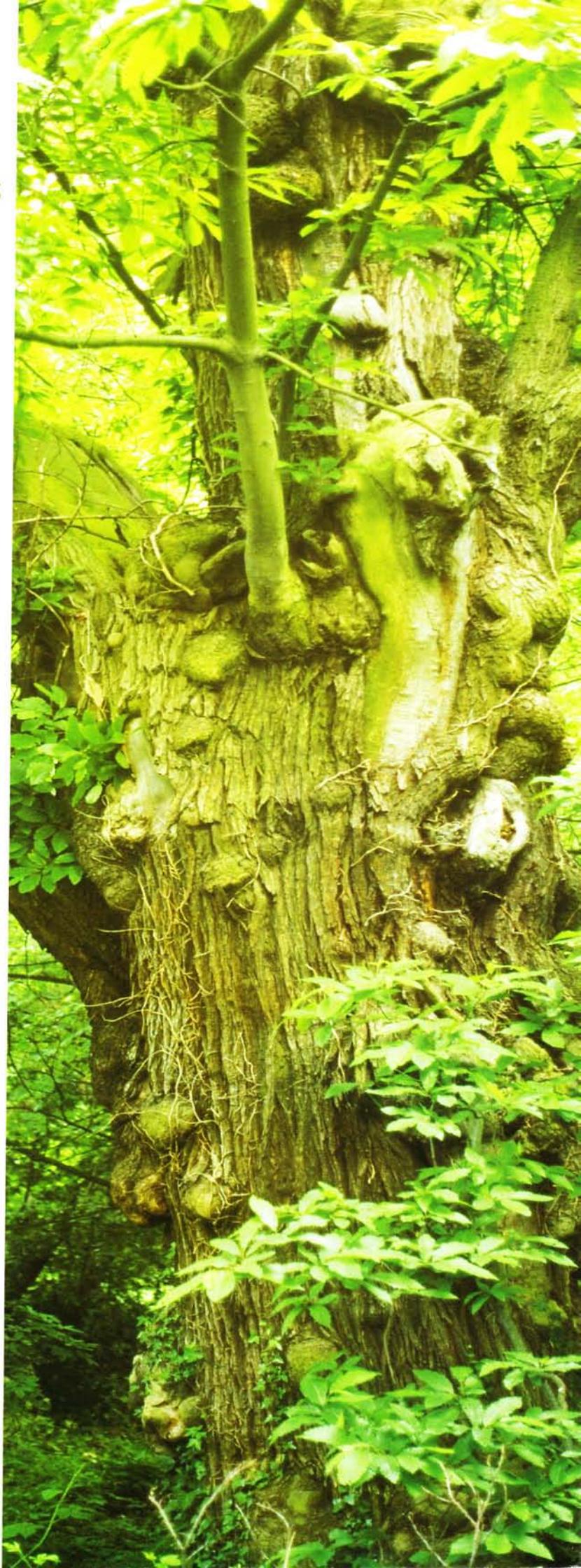
Templeton was a great supporter of the United Irishmen. He inherited Cranmore ('big tree'), changing its name from the previous 'Orange Grove', so named because King William was believed to have tethered his horse to a tree in the grounds on his way to the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

The chestnuts are thought to have been planted when the house was first built, 1620-40, so they pre-date John Templeton.

Old they may be, but still growing. They also produce viable seed which has been used by pupils of local prep school Inchmarlo to grow new chestnut trees.

There is some concern over the future of this land with its magnificent trees; apart from the chestnuts there are several other important trees including a rare long-leaved *Quercus ilex lanceolata*. And what about the remains of the house? Surely there is a possible restoration project here.

The Cranmore chestnut.
Photograph by Peter Cush



KING JAMES'S SWEET CHESTNUT

Across Belfast Lough on the southern shore, in leafy Cultra, is a sweet chestnut traditionally associated with King James, although he may never have visited it.

The tree is in a private garden which was once part of the grounds of a single large house, before being developed for smaller houses. In this case, the new houses have been carefully sited to keep the outstanding trees, and the sweet chestnut, accompanied by evergreen oak, have survived the changes.

It is taller and leafier than its rivals, with new green growth from low down on the

trunk. At first glance, this disguises its massive size. There is a hollow at the base of the trunk which has not bothered the tree at all. It has benefited from careful tree surgery at the time of the new housing and is a fine example of how an old tree, looked after, can continue to thrive.

King James at Cultra, King William at Scarva - the one tall and strong, the other wide-spreading and vigorous. A parallel for our times? Their trees still alive, their memories still resonating in politics today.



ROBINSON'S GOLD

Among the variants of garden cypresses, this one is golden. In 1962 it was discovered growing in Belvoir Park Forest on the edge of Belfast by the forester, the late George Robinson, who transplanted the little seedling into a flower pot and then to his own garden. It grew, flourished, and like other cypress could be propagated by cuttings so that many more Robinson's Gold could be produced from the one parent. This tree has been used on the coat of arms of Castlereagh Council and on the medallion of the mayor's chain, as an entirely unique tree which originated in the district.



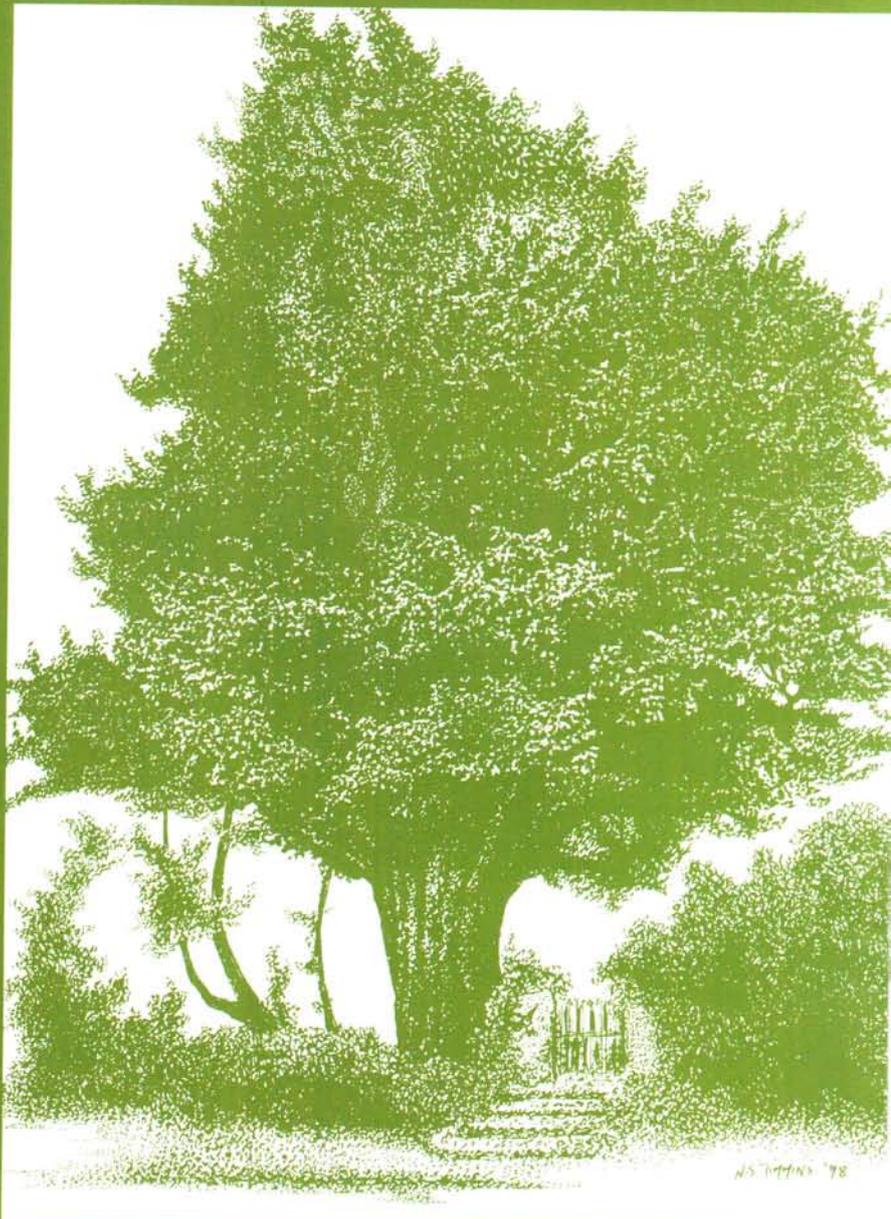
the wesley trees

John Wesley is one of the greatest figures in church history of recent centuries. A loyal member of the Church of England, he nonetheless became the founder of the Methodist Church. His special mission was to preach Christianity to the working population, people whom he considered to be ignored by the conventional clergy of the 18th century.

In particular, John Wesley was a travelling preacher throughout the British Isles who made a series of trips to the North of Ireland. He had good friends in the Lagan Valley, preaching to workers in the mills which then dominated commercial life in the area.

This yew *Taxus baccata europaeus* is beside a delightful small historic house on the outskirts of Derrriaghy. The original entrance steps and pillars lead into the front garden, and beside them is the Wesley yew. It can be seen without entering this private garden.

It is known that John Wesley preached here on 16th June 1778, and he commented then on the great age of the yew. Unlike deciduous trees of this great age, the yew shows no signs of decline. The trunk has the appearance of many fused columns, with a multitude of branches born in a gently spreading form. Its shape is obviously very stable and secure, as it appears to have lost no branches. Slow and steady seems to win the age race !



The Wesley Yew, Derrriaghy

THE BALLYSKEAGH BEECH

Not far away is another house associated with John Wesley, with very special trees. Chrome Hill was originally owned by the Wolfenden family who came to Lambeg from Brunswick in 1603, founding mills and living in what was then named Harmony Hill. The house and mills were sold in 1815 to Mr Richard Nevin who named it Chrome Hill after chemicals he had introduced for yellow dye in the linen process.

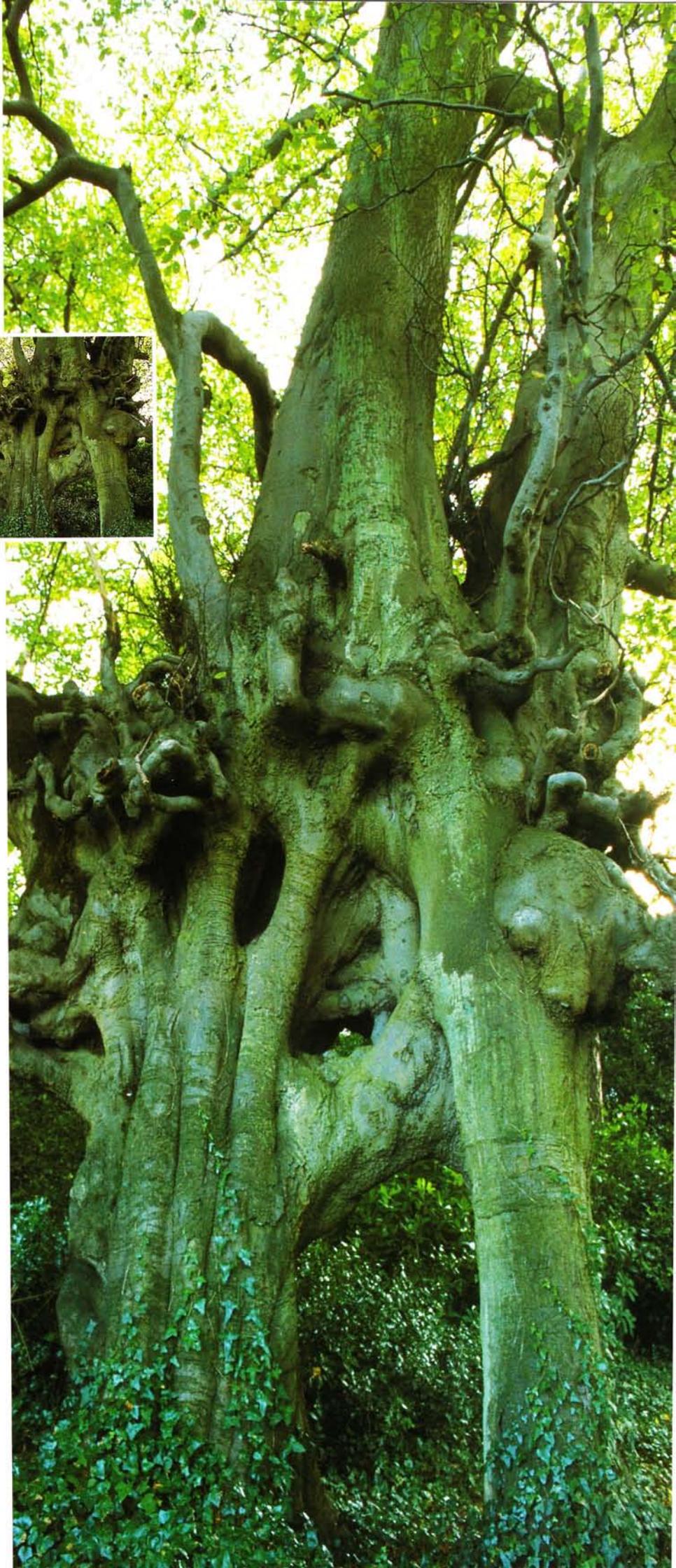


In 1787, John Wesley stayed with his friends the Wolfenden family while preaching in the area. During his visit he twined two beech *Fagus sylvatica* saplings together, it is said to symbolise the essential unity of Methodism and Anglicanism.

Today this is growing like one tree, with the two trunks forming an arch at the base of the two trunks. The many branches intertwine and link, the trunk is fissured and marked by age, but the tree is exceptionally vigorous. Perhaps it gives hope for ultimate church unity? It comes into leaf earlier than the surrounding single beeches, and is in all ways an exceptional tree.

Although the grounds are private, the McKinstry family, who now own Chrome Hill, permit visits to the tree, which is right by the entrance gates off the Ballyskeagh Road.

Because of the known fondness of John Wesley for preaching under trees, many have been planted in his memory beside Methodist Churches and Wesley Halls throughout Ireland.





survivors

Neglect, age, decay and human interference have taken their toll on our old trees. Some valiant specimens survive.

THE MOTHER OF ALL IRISH YEWS

The origin of the Florence Court yew is well documented. According to the Irish tree specialist (and Fermanagh man) Dr. Charles Nelson, two young yew seedlings were found on a Fermanagh hillside around 1740-60.

The two seedlings were separated, one going to the finder's own garden, and the other to his landlord the Earl of Enniskillen at Florence Court. This yew prospered and as it grew it became clear that the upright growth which had first led to its adoption and transplanting was not just a juvenile form - it lasted. Easily propagated from cuttings, the Florence Court yew became popular with Victorian plantsmen and nurserymen throughout Britain. It has been planted in gardens, at memorials and in churchyards ever since.

An Irish yew at the entrance to Aldergrove airport celebrates the millionth tree planted in the Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland Million Tree Campaign. The Forest of Belfast initiative is planting over 1,000 yews for the Millennium in graveyards of all denominations throughout greater

Belfast.

The original yew is still at Florence Court, lurking modestly in Forest Service land beside the house which is now National Trust property. It looks as if it



CVNI's millionth tree at Aldergrove airport - an Irish yew descended from the one at Florencecourt

has had a hard life. Maybe the endless propagation has sapped its strength, maybe it just feels like a many times over great grand-mother whose offspring have emigrated and helped to populate the world with Irish trees. Past its prime it may be, but the Florence Court yew is still a potent symbol.



THE TRAGEDY OF THE ELM

Both English elms *Ulmus procera* and wych elm *Ulmus glabra* are found in Ireland. While Dutch elm disease strikes the English species most readily, very few elm appear to be immune. There are some fine survivors left, like this one in the Blackwater River Valley in south Tyrone.

Many are associated with large houses and estates: Benvarden, North Antrim, has a fine wych elm on the front lawn.

THE TREASURE TREE



The excavated base of the Crom oak



The ash during show time in 1998

Among the many fine oaks in the Crom estate, Co Fermanagh, is one that has a remarkable story, for which it has suffered over the years.

Back in the seventeenth century, the Crichton family lived in the old castle, now picturesque ruins by the lough shore. (Subsequently they moved across to Inisherik, where some of the finest oak trees grow today, - but that house burnt down and finally the family settled in the present castle).

The castle was under siege in 1689 and fearing defeat the family collected their money and jewels and buried them deep under an oak tree growing nearby. In fact they won the battle, but rumour had it that the buried treasure was never recovered - perhaps, given the troubled times, it was thought safer to leave it in the equivalent of a modern bank deposit.

So, well into this century, people dug for treasure. The nearest oak now (though it has to be said that it is unlikely to date back to 1689) is a battered specimen which has lost great branches to storm and lightning - but more than that - its has practically been dug up.

The trunk grows straight, the roots anchor it to the ground, but between the two there is open space with tunnels going in towards the roots from all angles, signs of the desperate treasure hunt.

The story is further complicated by links to 'fairy gold' buried by the tree and guarded by magic powers, or by leprechauns. There was a death threat in force to anyone except a member of the Crichton family and a single family retainer - outsiders risked their lives trying to find the treasure.

THE ANCIENT ASH

Entering Castlewellan Forest Park, on one side is the vast field where the annual Castlewellan agricultural show and other events take place.

Standing by itself, easily seen from the entrance drive, is an ancient native ash, *Fraxinus exelsoir*.

Its trunk is the largest of any tree in the field, though lime, beech, and sweet chestnut have much greater crown growth. The ash is an old survivor, battered and part dead.

Its trunk is nearly 20' in girth. It is hollow, with cavities at the roots which

are great knobbly growths spreading out all round yet still keeping the old trunk firmly anchored.

Because the tree is not conventionally beautiful it has been threatened with felling, removal, 'tidying away'. Thank goodness for local forester Sam Harrison who has defended it. The ash is a super example of just how much life there can be in a senescent tree. Birds, bats and insects would miss it sorely if it went. So would sheep and people, at least once a year.

THE FORGOTTEN MAPLE

To pick one tree in a forest is a difficult task, but this is a solitary survivor in a sad setting. Castle Caldwell Forest extends along the peninsula which juts out into the western end of Lower Lough Erne; part is an RSPB reserve. Beside the utterly derelict castle is a tree which is contemporary with the castle and seems to bear it company. This is a large field maple *Acer campestre*. The tree is a mature spreading specimen, 13' round its trunk which is a remarkable size for this species. The crown is heavy with foliage, bearing many flowers and winged seeds especially on the older twigs with their dark foliage - new growth is lighter in colour. Lichen drapes any bare twigs, typical of the damp un-polluted air of west Fermanagh. Far more sinister is the heavy growth of ivy up the trunk and spreading out along branches, inevitably weighing them down and weakening them.



HOLM FROM HOME

One Evergreen oak or Holm oak *Quercus ilex* has been treated very specially. The Sir Samuel Kelly home in Holywood, built and run by the Salvation Army, was built to accommodate elderly people and also to accommodate an elderly tree.

In front of the entrance of the smart new building is an old evergreen oak, the subject of caring tree surgery and now in good hands for its old age. The trunk is 16' 6" round, a mighty girth, and four main branches carry a spread of foliage. By saving a noble tree, the home has a ready-made feature rather than having to plant new material. It may also inspire the human residents to a healthy old age !



A GRANDFATHER AT BELVOIR

The Lagan Valley between Belfast and Lisburn is still a tree-rich area. Best known was the great oak at Belvoir Park Forest, recorded by the famous photographer Robert Welch and considered to be well over 300 years old over a century ago. This tree was taken as the crest of the family resident at Belvoir - Deramore or great oak.

One large oak near the Motte is still known as the Belvoir oak though it is not recognisable as Welch's tree, which was huge. This one is still wonderfully impressive, low-growing with branches that are accessible to children - and so big they look like a group of trunks rising from the ground. The tree is flourishing, bearing a mass of leaves, and a great crop of acorns most years.

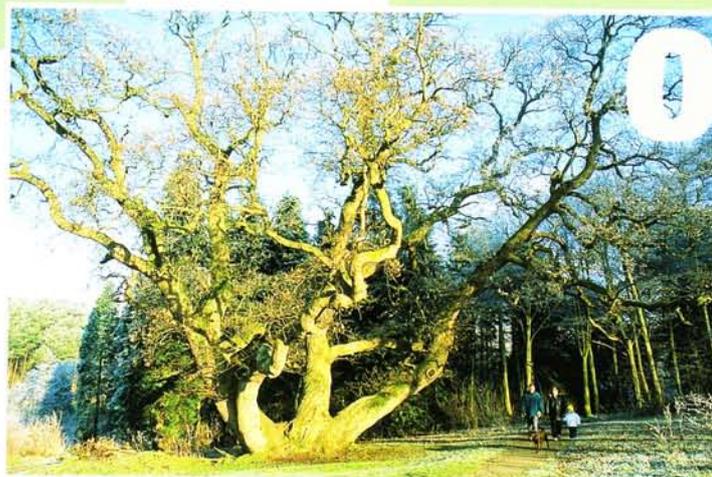
Thanks to the local initiative 'Friends of Belvoir' many of the acorns have been gathered, germinated, and young saplings planted out in the area. Offspring of the great oak will grow up close by, but it is to be hoped that the grandfather of them all has many healthy years ahead.

The original Belvoir oak (Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland)

Oak trees are long-lived, given the chance. They may take hundreds of years to reach maturity, last for hundreds in their prime and then take a few hundred more years to decline.



Morelands Meadow,
Lagan Valley



The present day Belvoir oak

Oaks

THE SHANE'S CASTLE GIANT



Shane's Castle, Co. Antrim has great oak trees - among the oldest and biggest in Northern Ireland.

The greatest of the oaks stands beside the ruins of the previous castle, a fine house on the shore of Lough Neagh,

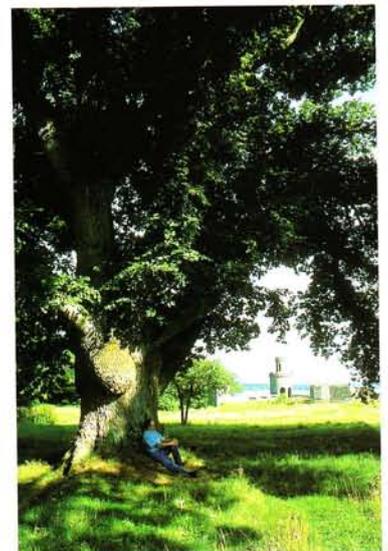
accidentally burnt when it was still a relatively new building. It is a perfect oak in shape and stature and measures 20' 10" around its circumference.

The age of oaks at Shane's has been the subject of dendronchronolgy, dating by tree rings. By examining trees felled in 1982 one was dated to 1675, another felled in 1989 was even earlier at 1649. The giant survivor by the old castle could be of this sort of age, seventeenth century.

The oaks are relics of a time before the great house of Shane's Castle was built, before villages were cleared to make way for the fields in which they now stand.

Very few oaks in the Province go back this far. The oaks at Inisherk, Crom, are much the same size as those at Shane's, though there does not seem to be one quite up to Shane's biggest (but close!)

Their size is due to rapid growth in the rich soil and damp climate so they have wide annual growth rings. By taking horizontal borings into the trunk, live trees may be aged without felling - this has indicated around 1780 for the older Crom oaks, most are nineteenth century.





AN ORCHARD OAK

This oak stands in an orchard outside the wall of Ardross House, National Trust property in Co. Armagh, with ancient apples and fine broad-leaved trees all growing strongly in the rich soil of the area. There are other oaks nearby, but none have the stature of this specimen, standing alone at the field edge. It measures 17' 6" around the slimmest part of the trunk, and must be over 100 ft high. It is a splendid upstanding tree, still growing strongly, its branches reaching high in perfect formation. And no-one seems to know how it came to be there.



AN OAK ALONE

Long before Gosford was an official forest, it had trees. Great oaks were known to be here centuries ago and some have survived, amazingly, surrounded by spruce in forest plantations. Just by the main car park is a path leading towards the arboretum. Right beside that path, standing proud in an area newly cleared of trees around it, with its attendant ivy mostly trimmed away, is a magnificent old oak. Almost every branch is still green and healthy, bearing leaves, flowers and acorns. With the canopy in full leaf, it is a wonderful sight. This is an unsung hero, a survivor of time and an invasion of conifers. With a circumference of 19' 6" it is a true veteran.

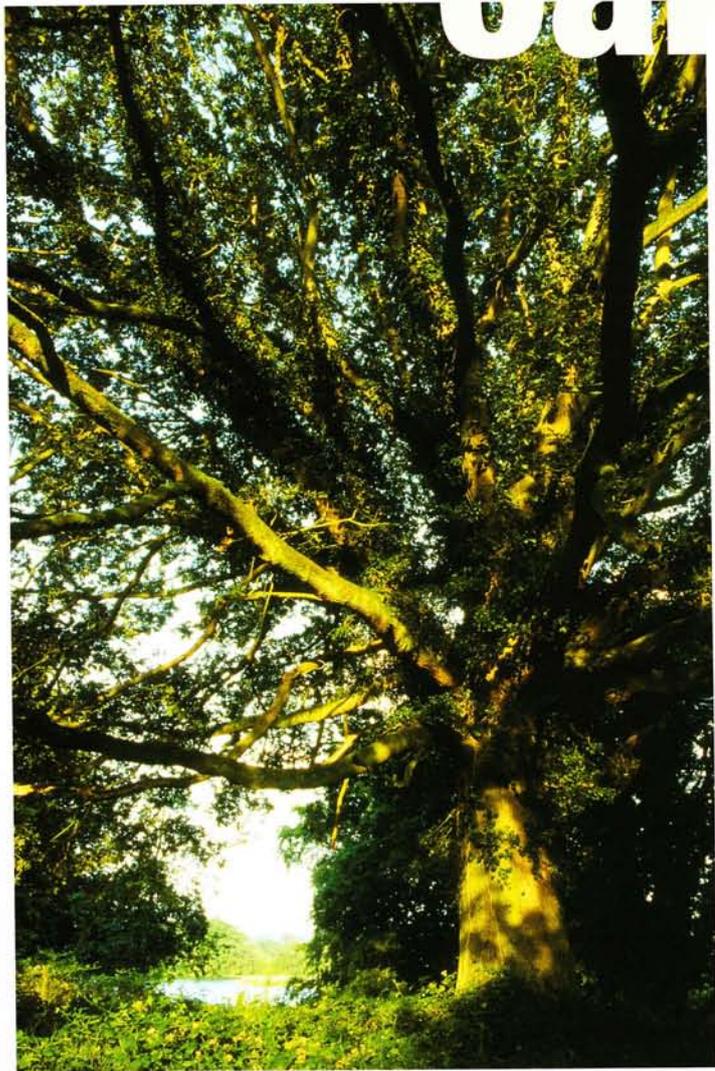
The oak at Gosford Forest Park, Co. Armagh

STATELY AT ENAGH

On the lawn outside Enagh House is a most magnificent oak tree, perfect in form, with smooth trunk and a mass of branches spreading out symmetrically. The trunk is relatively modest in girth compared with the immense area of the canopy which creates its own tree kingdom.

It is the focus for incredibly rich wildlife, including a colony of red squirrels whose lives are centred on this single vast tree. The house is outside Derry City, on the eastern side of Lough Foyle, and was built beside the ancient site of Enagh Church and graveyard.

The tree is much older than the house, which was built in the nineteenth century by the Alexander family, major local landowners. The complex of Enagh Loughs east and west with small streams, wet woodland, and a range of trees of different ages and species makes an excellent wildlife area. The oak is at its heart.



THE HOTEL OAK

This oak has a special claim to fame as the first tree in Northern Ireland to be protected by a Tree Preservation Order. It stands right behind the Killyhevlin Hotel, on the main road just east of Enniskillen.

When the hotel was extended, a tree expert insisted that care was taken not to damage the oak. In spite of bombings and repeat re-building, it has survived and indeed thrived. It is a tall fine oak, (17' round) always with a complement of chattering blue tits and other small birds hunting for insects among its branches.

A tall, mature tree with a thick trunk and dense green canopy, standing in a park-like setting with other trees and a person at its base for scale.

commemorative
trees

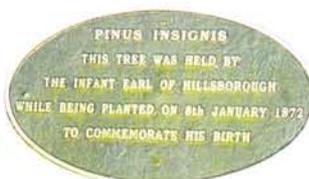
There is a tradition of planting trees to commemorate special events like a battle, a coronation, or a new building. Families planted trees to mark a birth, a wedding, or as a memorial after death. And many small trees owe their existence to state visits by royalty or presidents.

IN BIRTH...

Within the grounds of the great house at Hillsborough is one extra tall pine, *Pinus insignis*. Its accompanying plaque states that it was 'held by the infant Earl of Hillsborough when it was planted on 8th January 1871 to commemorate his birth'.

This conjures up a wonderful vision of carefully guided chubby infant hands clutching a tall slender sapling as attendant adults held it straight and true. Planted in a sheltered spot by the lake, nourished by rich soil, the pine would have outgrown the child in very few years. It now overtops most trees in the estate, and provides a living memorial. Within the grounds of Hillsborough Castle are many superb trees including a fine cedar of Lebanon and a range of oaks including an immense far spreading Turkey oak. There is a mossy lime walk, an avenue of 20 or more clipped yews, redwoods, a large evergreen oak and a weeping willow over the formal pond - though not large, this is unusual for Northern Ireland.

The trees have been carefully maintained and have benefited from precision tree surgery to keep their health and shape. Sadly they are only seen by the relatively small number of people allowed admittance to the grounds, or invited to a garden party. If security eases, these trees may become more accessible.



The Pinus Insignis at Hillsborough



The yew walk



Cedar of Lebanon



The lime avenue

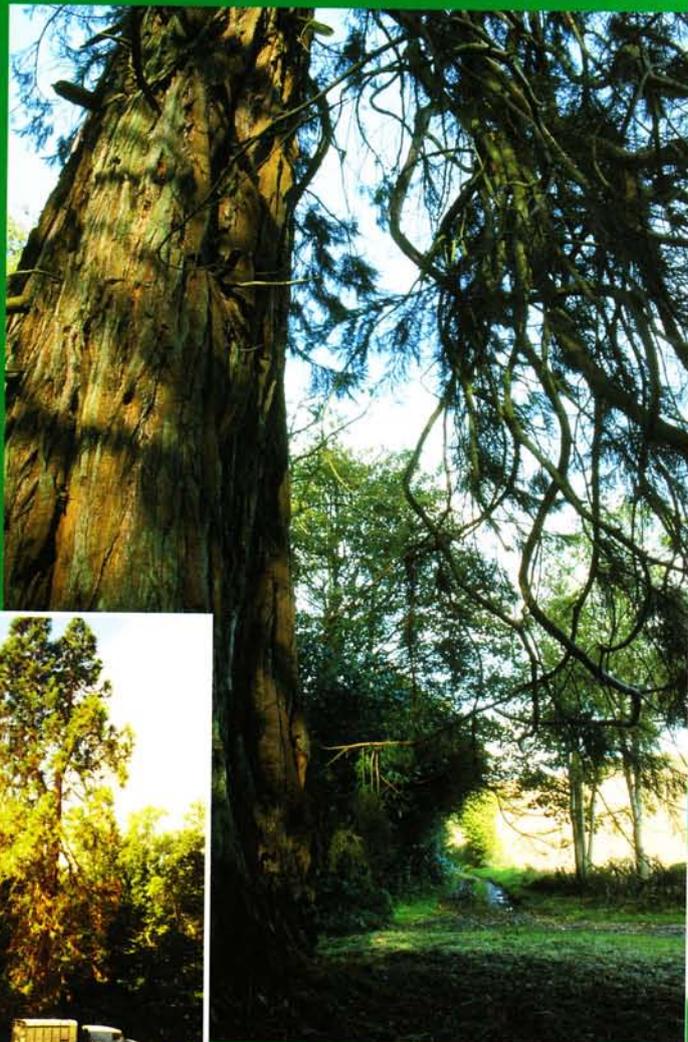


Weeping willow by the formal pond

...AND DEATH

There is a long association of evergreen, dark trees with burial grounds.

At Caledon, Co. Tyrone, seat of the Earls of Caledon, a fine memorial may be seen from the main road through the village. Most notable are the monkey puzzle trees which form an avenue to the monument. Above this, now partly obscured by the fine Irish yews which flank it, once rose a Doric column bearing a statue of a former Earl who died at Caledon in 1839; this was blown up in the early 1970s. Together the three estates of Tynan, Caledon and Glaslough Co. Monaghan occupy wonderfully rich riverside land in a triangle where Tyrone, Armagh, and Monaghan meet.



FOR A WEDDING

Within the Seaforde Demesne and in Seaforde village, Co. Down, there are many fine trees. Some trees owe their existence to staff of the estate, especially Mr Allan who was in charge of all the gardens and grounds in their heyday in the last century.

Visitors to the gardens drive past a varied selection of trees along the entrance road, then under a row of mature beech beside the walled garden: the main car park has a yew as its centrepiece. Just beyond this, at a meeting point of three estate roads, stands the 'wedding tree', a great *Wellingtonia Sequoiadendron giganteum* (measuring 22'8") planted by Mr Allan to commemorate his wedding. It stands tall and proud, a landmark among the estate roads.

AND CORONATIONS TOO

In the centre of Eglinton, Co Derry, a truly English oak was planted for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902. This very special oak was grown from an acorn from one of the famous oak trees in Windsor Great Park around the royal residence of Windsor Castle.

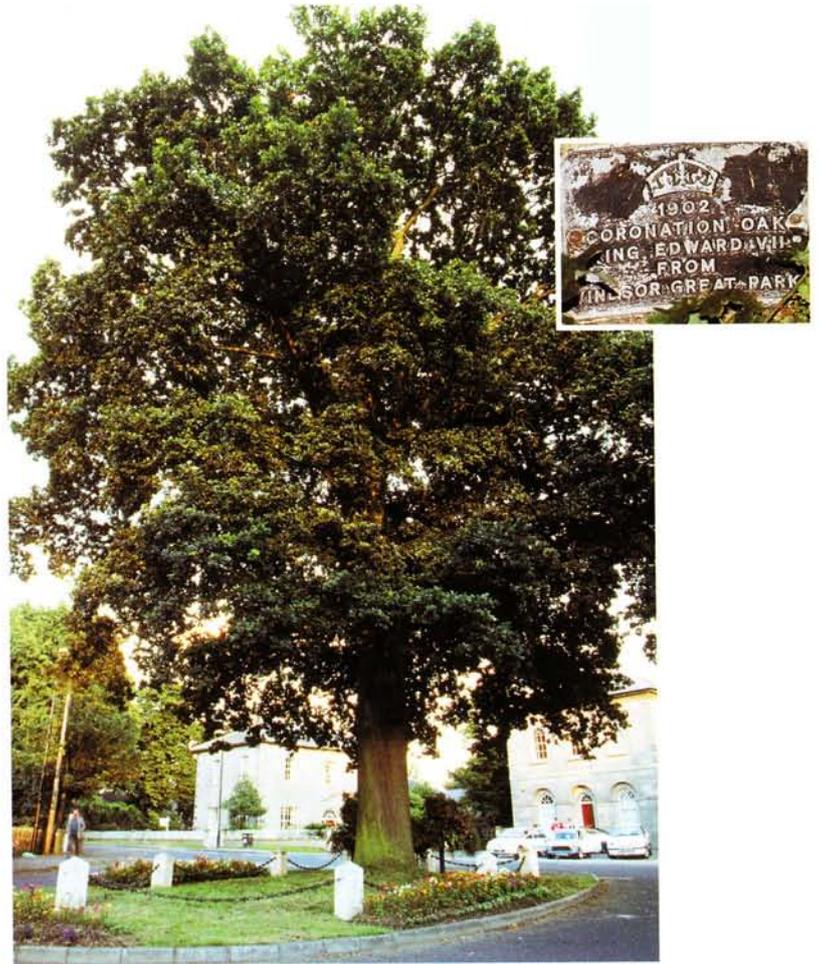
The tree stands in a small grassy triangle, shaken by heavy lorries and traffic all round, but somehow attracting a dozen or more pairs of rooks to nest in its branches.

A more recent coronation oak is to be found in the heart of Derry City at Aberfoyle. This house and gardens, once the property of Sir Basil McFarland, is now owned by Magee College/University of Ulster.

The oak was planted to mark the coronation in 1953 of the present Queen Elizabeth II. While Sir Basil wielded the spade, the tree was handed over by John Magowan and his sister, children of the Aberfoyle head gardener. This early tree experience may have been formative for John - he now works for Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland and Trees in the City Campaign in Derry!

The gardens are open to the public. Quite apart from fine trees and other plants, it is a haven for wildlife.

On one visit, a treecreeper was working its way up along the branches of the Coronation oak, far more concerned with its next meal than with our presence.



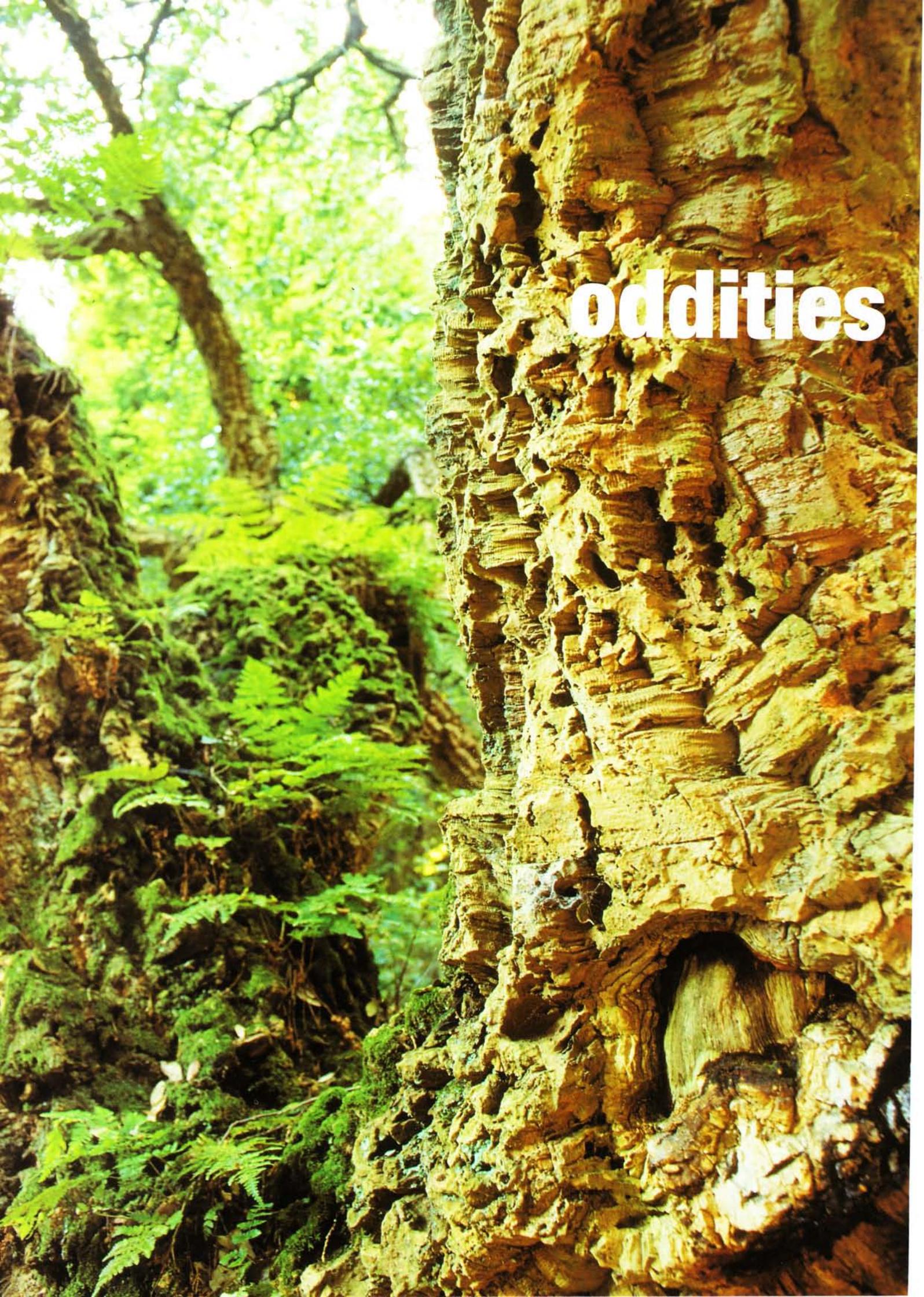
The Eglinton coronation oak



The Aberfoyle planting in 1953



John Magowan and the oak in 1998



oddities

This is a tiny selection of unusual trees planted in gardens, forest and public parks. There are many more: try Belfast parks, especially the Botanic Gardens.

THE CORK OAK

The Cork Oak *Quercus suber* lives up to its name in its native Spain and Portugal where the bark is harvested to provide corks for wine and other bottles. The specimen at Tollymore, in Co. Down, is carefully protected behind a wooden fence just within the arboretum, perhaps to prevent people helping themselves to a cork or two.

This oak is a craggy old specimen, looking as though it should be on a dry rocky outcrop in Spain rather than in damp Co. Down. The trunk is solid, with three main branches forming a spreading crown. Its bark is thick and fissured, sections along the branches looking just like rows of bottle corks ready and waiting to be used.

Our damp climate has encouraged epiphytes - plants growing on the bark (not parasites) - such as lichens, mosses, and these ferns.



The bark of the Cork Oak

HER LADYSHIP'S TREE

Beside the leisure centre in Bangor is a mulberry tree, an unusual species here where the climate rarely allows it to produce its flavourful deep red berries. This tree was primarily grown for its leaves, which are the food plant for silkworms.

The story is that the Lady of the Manor, the Hamilton family in Bangor Castle, kept silkworms: these are caterpillars, which when they pupate spin themselves cocoons of pure silk which can then be unravelled and the thread spun into cloth. There is no record if she succeeded in this but it is quite possible - silk manufacture was carried out on a commercial scale in England for many years.

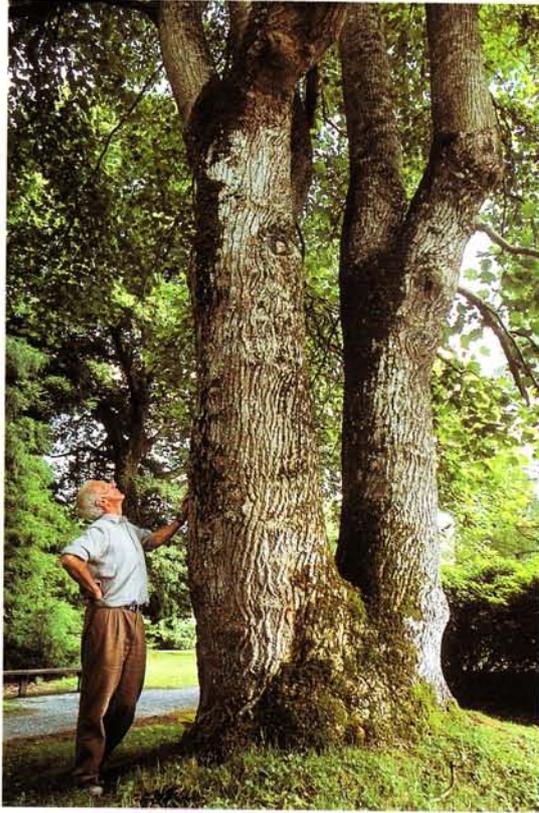
THE GARDENER'S PRIDE AT DRUM

Drum Manor in Co Tyrone repays exploration with fine trees hidden away including a beech avenue and a stand of beech in a shelter belt recorded by Alan Mitchell as some of the tallest in Northern Ireland.

Just in front of the gardener's house is a lovely example of the Tulip tree *Liriodendron sp.* The gardener must have loved his trees, planting and caring for the variety of specimens at Drum. Did he choose this one to see from his own windows?

The tree is 13' 2" round its trunk and about 60' tall, one of the largest in the Province. Tulip trees flower only occasionally in our climate, but the pale green foliage is a delight at any time. Each leaf is lobed, with what looks like a 'pinch' taken out of the tip. The old story is that the tulip tree grew in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, Eve reached back and pinched a piece out of the leaf so as to have something left of paradise. The tulip tree leaf has borne this shape ever since.

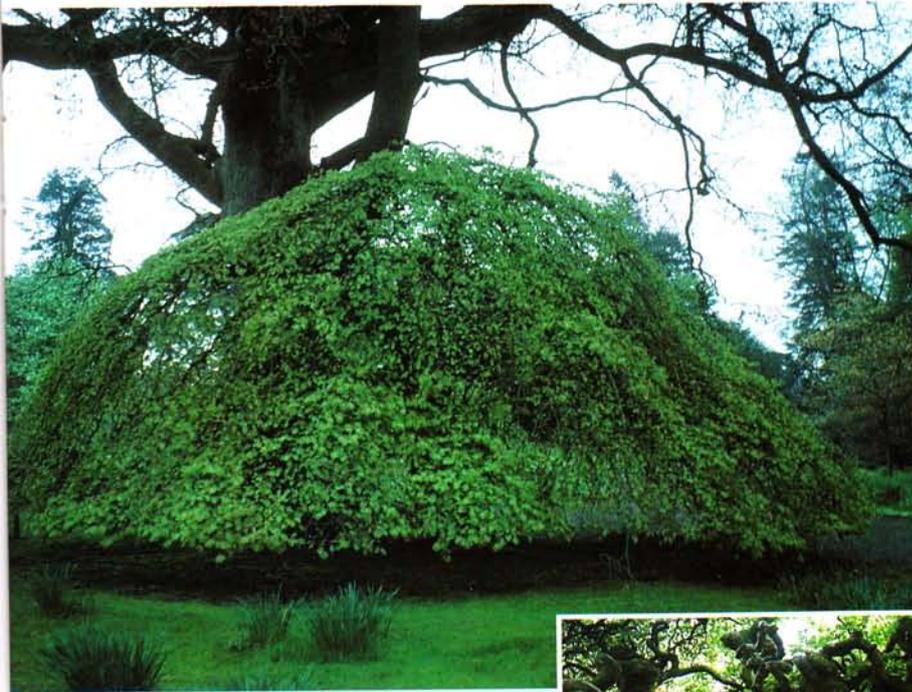
Tulip trees have recently been used as street trees in a new planting scheme in Richhill, Co. Armagh.



The Tulip Tree outside the Beechlawn Hotel

There is a remarkable tulip tree in Dunmurry outside the Beechlawn House Hotel planted by the former owner when the house was private. The footpath makes a detour to give the tree space, but it has had to withstand tarmac all round it and a metal religious plaque fixed to its trunk - the bark is beginning to grow over the edge as if to hold it in place.

TWO FINE PARASOLS AT PARKANAUR



Parkanaur in Co Tyrone is typical of forests with a house and gardens which include some fine specimen trees of varied species. In the parkland, these fine trees shade the unique herd of white fallow deer, descended from a herd in Co Cork which were a present from Queen Elizabeth I in the sixteenth century. Although the house is private, the various specimen trees on the lawn may be visited. Among them are two extraordinary trees *Fagus sylvatica* var. *Tortuosa*. These were described in 1885 as "which at a short distance resemble heaps of leaves rather than trees".

It is said that they had been found growing naturally in the woods 60 years before and transplanted to the garden, so they date from around 1880. In 1885 they were 6-8 feet in height. They are now around 12-15 feet high, but such specimens grow very slowly.

The trees live up to their name of 'parasol beech'. They look like rounded green mounds, their outer branches trailing to the ground all around. It is possible to walk inside and see the solid trunks and contorted branches, some like corkscrews, from which spring all this greenery.

These trees are not normal weeping beech

Fagus sylvatica pendula, which grows taller and often needs a little judicious trimming to maintain downward growth. These show no inclination to grow upwards but keep their low ground touching symmetrical growth. They may not be giants, but they are very special.

NEWCOMERS AT SAINTFIELD

Saintfield House has a fine old monkey puzzle, one of the earliest planted in Northern Ireland. In an illuminated address presented in 1902 to Major J.N. Blackwood Price (whose family are still there) the monkey puzzle is shown to be a good size even then - it is now about 70' tall, with a mini offspring at its base.

Discovered in 1795, when botanist Archibald Menzies on board the *Discovery* was given some of the nuts, the tree was introduced to Victorian gardens some years later once enough specimens had been propagated. This links well with the apparently 40 year old tree painted around 1900.



The monkey puzzle with its 'baby'

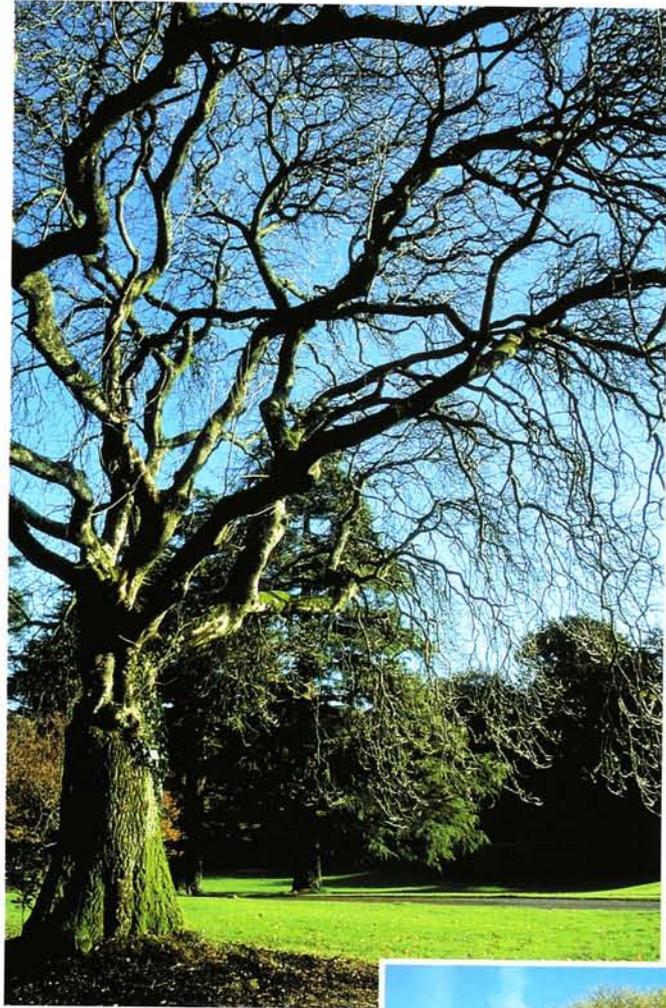
THE MANNA ASH

The manna ash has twisty branches with twigs bending downwards, dark smooth bark and a dense canopy of dark green leaves. It is not like a weeping ash (also grown as a graft) which is a form of the common ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. The manna ash *Fraxinus ornus* is quite different and bears creamy-white fragrant flowers. Were they perhaps seen as manna from heaven?

There is an excellent manna ash at Rowallane Gardens, Saintfield, just by the front of the lovely house which is the National Trust headquarters.

Another of these rarities is tucked away in the depths of Randalstown Forest. The tree recalls a former existence when the area was the deerpark of the Shane's Castle Estate next door. There was a forester's cottage here, which was round - sadly, it was demolished though it must have been of great interest.

The tree was probably planted around 1840 and would have been a very special feature in the garden of the little round house in the woods.



The manna ash at Rowallane in Autumn



THE LANDMORE MYSTERY

There are many reasons to find a tree special - its size, shape, age, setting, history, position in the landscape, association with a building. The solitary tree in front of Landmore House has them all.

On the road from Aghadowey to Kilrea, following the course of the mighty Lower Bann River, there is a tree which really catches the eye because of its distinctive shape and solitary position. When Landmore House was built in 1780 it is recorded that ten 'hickory'

trees were planted.

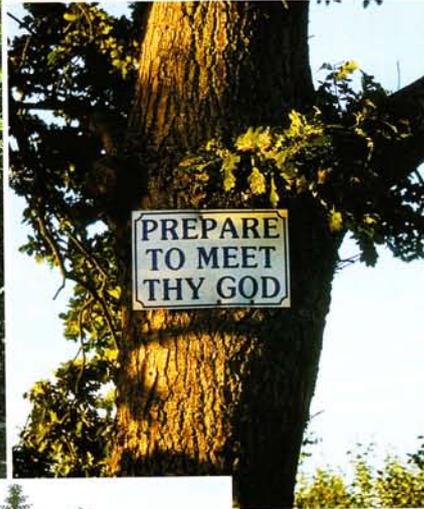
A subsequent owner felled nine of the trees for their timber, but he left this one in its central position.

The variety of hickory or wingnut - *Juglandacae* is not certain. The owners say they have never seen flower or fruit. The leaves come out in late Spring and fall suddenly in Autumn without colouring. The trunk is specially thick at the base: each Spring this is used by playful lambs for practice jumps on and off.





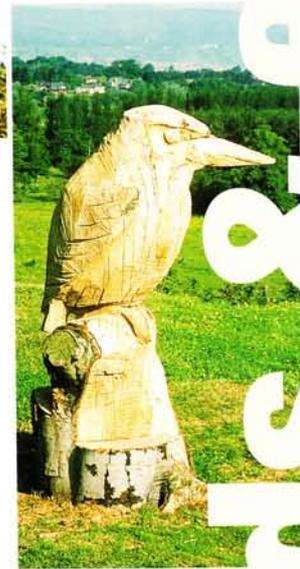
This tree house in Cultra has the tree growing up through the floorboards!



Religious plaques are commonplace in Northern Ireland, and trees are seen as an excellent post.



This squirrel was carved out of a solid oak tree by the Friends of Belvoir Forest in their nature reserve



Carved kingfisher at Belvoir Forest in Belfast



B & B spotted in Co Fermanagh



Even trees come in for a bit of a paint job in Belfast's Woodstock Road



Someone had an imaginative solution for this stump in the Lagan Valley Regional Park

historic *trees*



These trees are associated with historic events or characters. They may have been silent witnesses to the signing of peace treaties or bloody battles.

THE BLOODY OAK

One oak that seems to have its chances of survival severely curtailed is still triumphantly with us and is worth a tiny detour off the Armagh to Loughgall road. The small settlement of Salter's Grange is marked by a hilltop Church of Ireland church with a soaring spire (probably on the site of an older church) with its attendant conifers. Downhill from the church on the Armagh side stands a roadside oak - never a good place for a tree, with half the roots covered in impermeable tarmac. Approach from one side, and this appears to be a normal healthy oak. From the other, its nature as a survivor is revealed all too clearly - the trunk is completely hollow and open to the outside world. There is a great opening in the trunk, at least 10' high and 3' across. The inside has been burnt, the hollow extending up into the base of the main branches. The only wood left is a shell of live wood under the bark. A family of jackdaws nest within the tree, and are clearly possessive of it. Just to one side, a badger track across the road leads into fields. Around the base, cow parsley waves its delicate flower-heads, speckled wood butterflies flit among grasses: one roadside tree, a whole ecosystem. After the tree had been recognised, growing peacefully in its rural roadside setting, more of its grim history was unearthed. The tree had been known for many years as "The Bloody Oak". It stands at the junction of the Bloody Loaning (lane) which leads to a ford on the Callan river, a tributary of the Blackwater. Here on 14th August 1598 Marshall Bagenal, in charge of the English forces based at

Newry, was marching to the relief of a hard-pressed English garrison at Portmore (Blackwatertown). His force was completely overwhelmed and he was slain with 2,000 of his men at the battle of the Yellow Ford. The Bloody Loanen was so called because it was filled by bodies of dead and injured

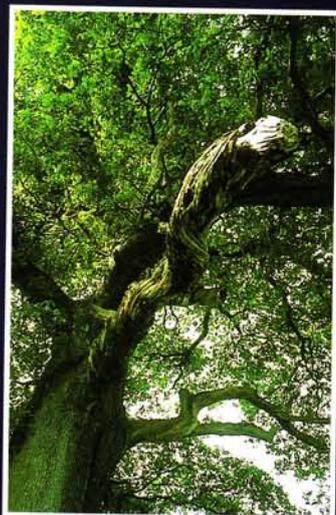


Jackdaw's nest in the charred cavity

soldiers - fugitives were hunted down and killed in the shadow of the oak, a mature tree even then. The dead branch of the tree is held to have died either because of bullets embedded in it at that time - and contemporary bullets are reported to have been removed from that part of the tree - or because it died 'in protest' having been used for hanging. The branch, recorded as being dead from root to tip for at least a hundred years, pointed west along the Bloody Loanen. It is hard to picture such death and cruelty in what is now a quiet rural lane, but the tree certainly has an air of suffering. Perhaps it was burned in retribution for the part it unwittingly played in such a savage battle. Against the odds, it survives and flourishes.



hanging trees



In the search for historic trees, hanging trees were mentioned but none were identified absolutely. Some must have existed to be remembered in folk lore, associated with conflict such as 1641 and 1798, but few such trees have survived.

The dramatic time of the 1798 rebellion had hanging trees, but more happily is associated with 'Liberty Trees' planted to celebrate and to express admiration for liberation achieved in the French Revolution and the American War of Independence which had many participants of Ulster origin.

THE LIBERTY TREE

At Roughfort near Mallusk in Co Antrim is a tree which carries all this history. Local historians link this tree to the 1798 United Irishmen uprising, Roughfort being one of the assembly points prior to marching on to the Battle of Antrim. Newtownabbey Borough Council in conjunction with local historians is currently promoting a book called *The Liberty Tree*, a direct reference to the Roughfort oak which is thought to have been planted during the 1790s when the United Irishmen had a custom of planting trees referred to as Liberty Trees as a symbol of freedom. It is also possible that it was planted after the rebellion to commemorate those from the area who were killed. The origin of its local name, The Hanging Tree is not known and it is thought unlikely it was ever used for this purpose.



THE HEZLETT HOUSE TREE



One tree suggested as a hanging tree is outside Hezlett House at Castlerock, a National Trust property. The story was never of a hanging, but of the threat of this grim fate, and even this is denied by the family.

The Hezlett House tree is an old sweet chestnut, now on the grassy roadside verge just outside the property.

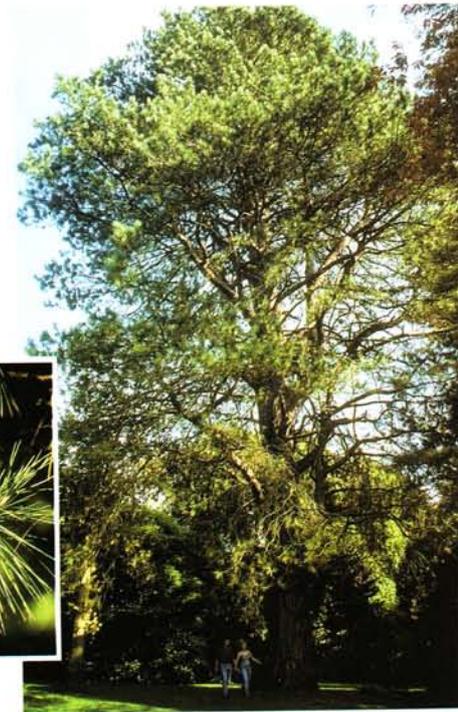
CAMPAIGN SOUVENIR AT SEAFORDE

The gardens of Seaforde include a great range of trees and shrubs from old estate plantings to recent introductions made by Patrick Forde after botanical expeditions to Bhutan, North Vietnam and China - not forgetting the extra entertainment of the maze.

One champion dominates the walled garden known as the Pheasantry. This is a Crimean pine *Pinus nigra caramanica* reaching over 100' in height. It is a

stately tree in very good health.

The family story is told of the Forde of the time who served in the Crimea with the Heavy Brigade (as opposed to the Light Brigade who so famously rode into 'the valley of death'). Surviving the conflict, he returned home with a souvenir - seed, cone or sapling, is not known - which was planted, cared for, and has grown into today's champion.



THE RECONCILIATION TREE

The hotel at Dunadry is a very up market establishment, catering to the famous personalities of the day. Its patrons may choose to enjoy the gardens and indulge in the age-old tradition of sitting and talking under a sheltering tree - surely more conducive to peace and reconciliation than a meeting room indoors.

What appears to be a single tree forms a centre point in the present garden. But these limes date back to harder times. Dunadry was a mill village, with single storey dwellings and small gardens running back to the river and mill race. Someone, sometime around 1830-40, planted two limes and linked them together.

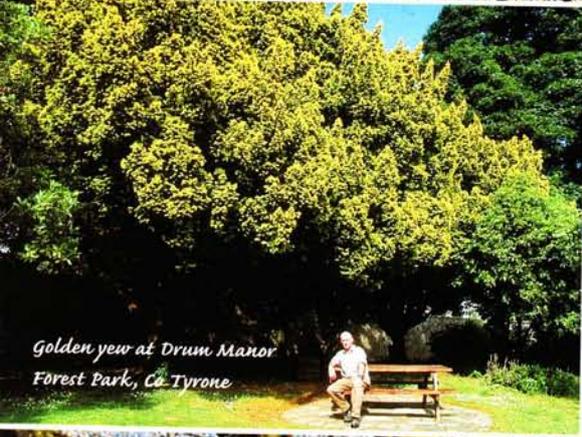
When the derelict mill and village were transformed into a hotel, the historic feel of the mill was retained in the decor inside and the tree/trees were kept outside, a wonderful survival.

Embellished by a circular seat bought in for this purpose, long may they continue to shelter constructive dialogue.

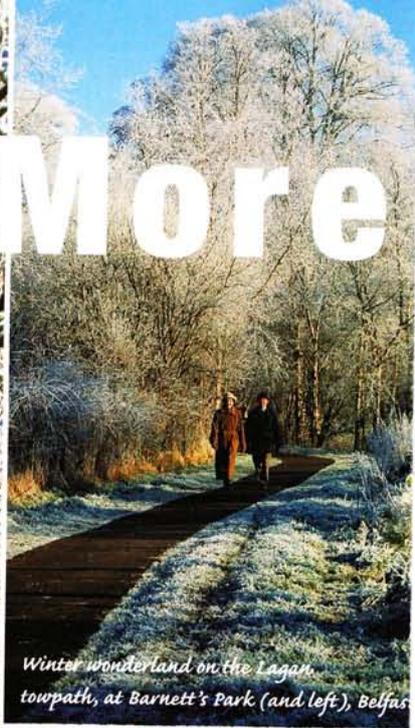


David Trimble, Tony Blair and John Hume share a moment of peace at Dunadry in May 1998. Photograph copyright of the Scotsman Publications Ltd

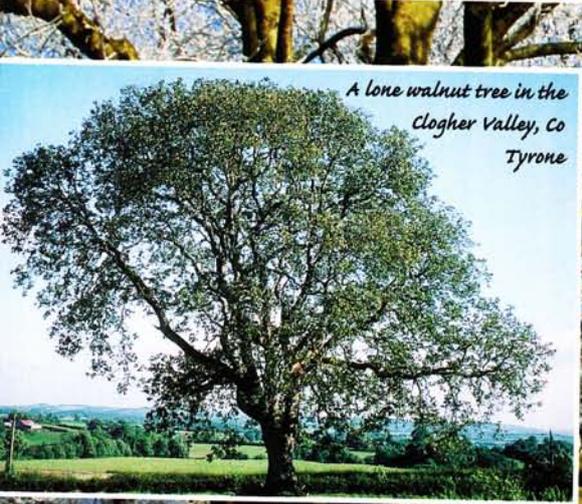
More



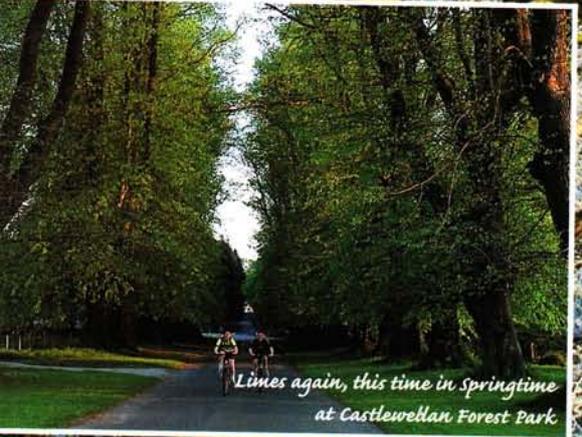
Golden yew at Drum Manor Forest Park, Co Tyrone



Winter wonderland on the Lagan towpath, at Barnett's Park (and left), Belfast



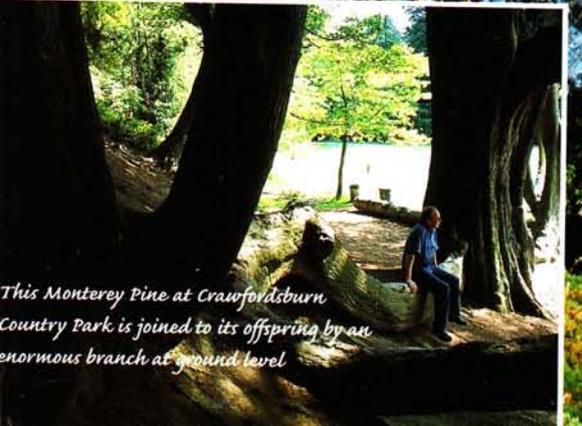
A lone walnut tree in the Clogher Valley, Co Tyrone



Lines again, this time in Springtime at Castlewellsan Forest Park



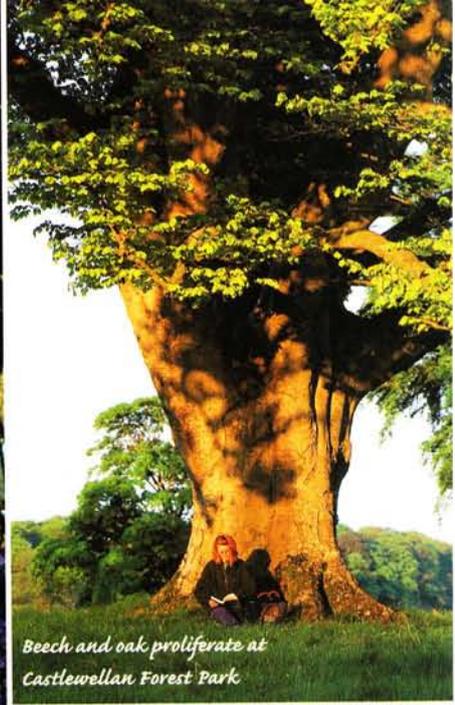
Churchyard yews at Carrick Mills, Roe Valley, Co Derry



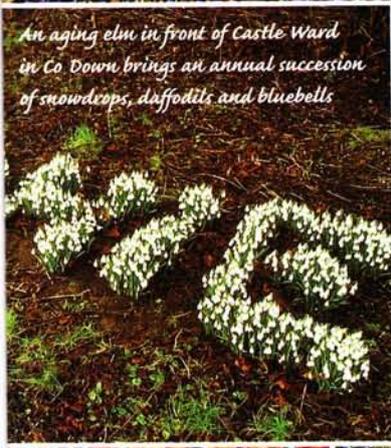
This Monterey Pine at Crawfordsburn Country Park is joined to its offspring by an enormous branch at ground level



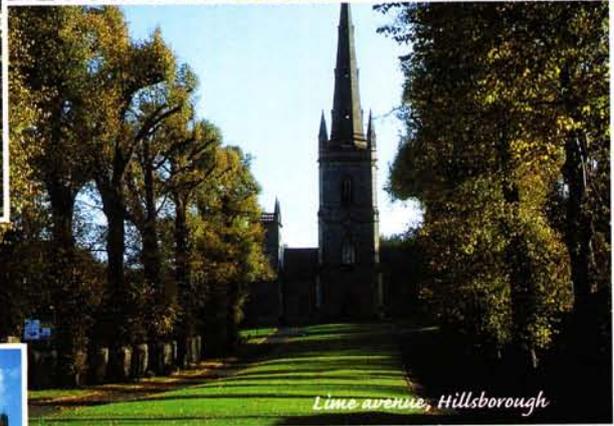
Remarkable trees



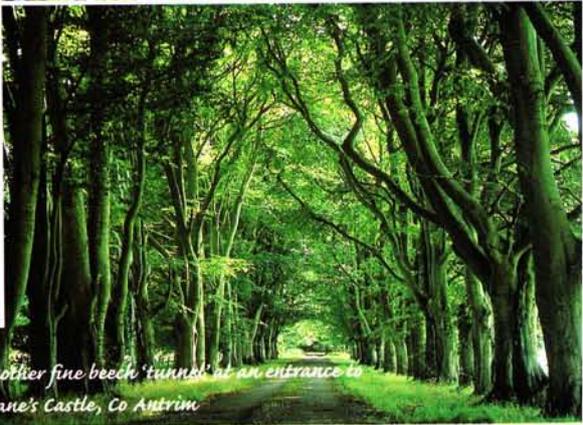
*Beech and oak proliferate at
Castlewella Forest Park*



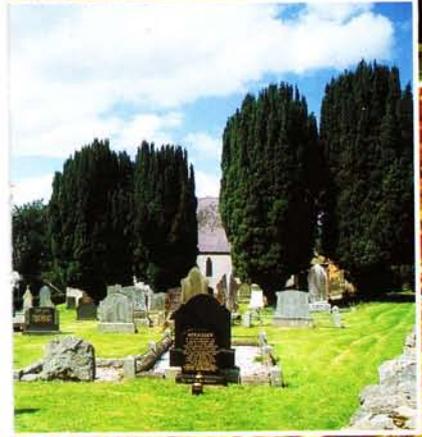
*An aging elm in front of Castle Ward
in Co Down brings an annual succession
of snowdrops, daffodils and bluebells*



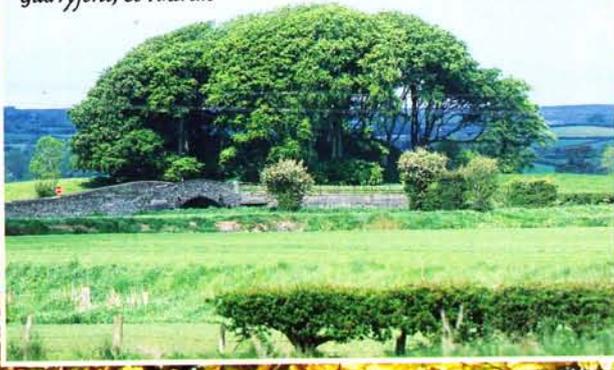
Lime avenue, Hillsborough

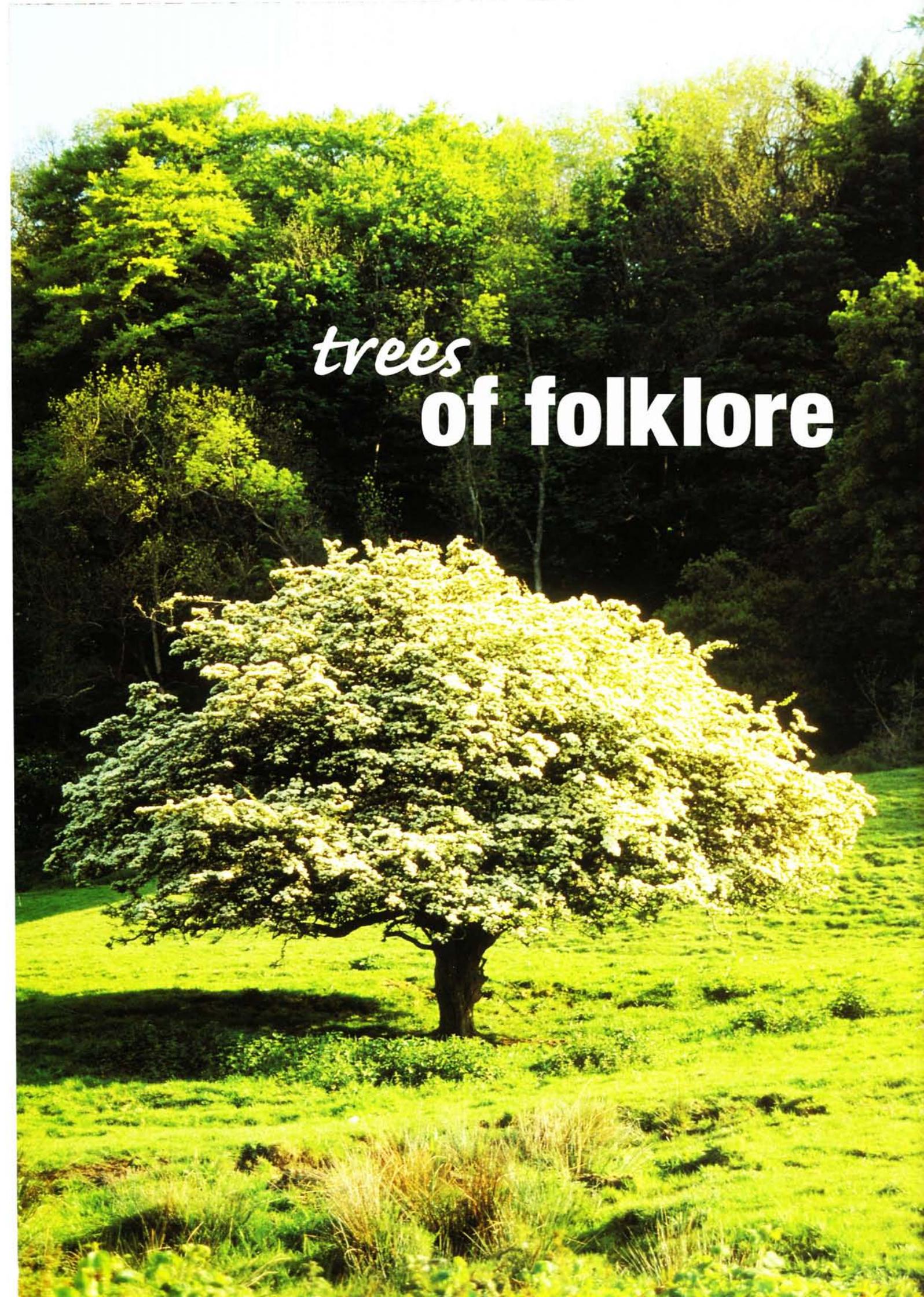


*Another fine beech 'tunnel' at an entrance to
Shane's Castle, Co Antrim*



*A beech-topped rath at
Glarryford, Co Antrim*



A large, leafy tree with a thick trunk stands in a grassy field. The tree's canopy is dense and bright green, contrasting with the darker green of the forest in the background. The foreground is filled with tall grasses and smaller plants. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

trees
of folklore

Some trees are famous not because of what they are, so much as where they are. Such trees are usually associated with ancient historic or religious sites and are an integral part of their magic and mystery.

Throughout the Northern Ireland countryside, there is a special tree - not one tree, but many - standing alone, unharmed through generations, guarding its special place. It is the Fairy Thorn.

Most are hawthorn, the white thorn with its May blossom. Some ancient sites, especially in the uplands, are guarded by a rowan or mountain ash, a tree with supernatural associations - a rowan branch hung over the stable or byre protected the animals from witchcraft.

Fairy thorns may be associated with archaeological sites, such as the Neolithic chambered graves and wedge tombs. They may stand beside wells and springs, places known to early man and sometimes adopted by Christianity as Church sites or Holy Wells.

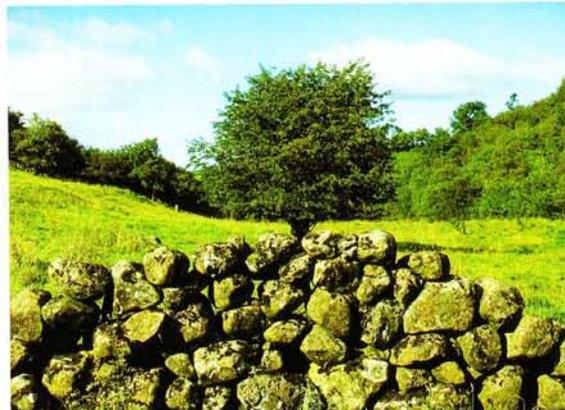
In some rural sites there may be no apparent built artefact beside a fairy thorn, but the tree may guard a small rise in the ground - a fairy hill, place of entry to the under or other world of the fairy folk.

One such thorn, beside cup-and-ring carved stones in an upland field in Fermanagh, was circled by tracks of small feet - they were badger marks, with signs of feeding, but could easily have been interpreted as fairy footprints dancing around the thorn at night.

Such special trees have a remarkable power about them. A gnarled thorn, often growing in harsh rocky ground, survivor of wind, weather, grazing, and many generations of man, has its own special strength. Stories still abound of misfortunes visited on those who risked disturbing such trees.



Fairy thorn in the Antrim Glens



A single fairy thorn in Glenarm, Co Antrim



Hawthorn berries

THE FRIAR'S BUSH, BELFAST



There is still a bush in the Friar's Bush graveyard, an old reclining hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* at the end of the path into the graveyard. This ancient burial ground, with its distinctive entrance building now being renovated, is next to the Ulster Museum in Stranmillis Road. Now disused, the graveyard served the Catholic population of Belfast until the opening of the city cemetery off the Falls Road.

The history of the Friar's Bush goes back to the earliest days of Christianity in Ireland, and possibly before that, since there is a mound in the graveyard believed to be of Neolithic age. It was not unusual for pagan 'holy' sites to be adopted for Christian teaching, and there is a tradition of worship at the Friar's Bush site back to the days of St. Patrick.

The bush gets its name from tale of a friar who used to say mass at this site - then well outside the city boundary - in the days of the Penal Laws when mass

had to be celebrated in secret. One Winter Sunday, he died suddenly (perhaps murdered) and was buried on the spot. A stone marked his grave, near the thorn bush where he preached. The size of the grave yard was increased by a gift of extra land from the Marquis of Donegall who also built the gate lodge and wall. The space was needed - use of the site for burials continued, notably with a mass grave known as the 'plaguey hill' for victims of the 1830s cholera epidemic. This was re-opened in 1847 for victims of the famine and associated typhus fever.

Mass was celebrated by the bush or thorn tree until relaxation of the Penal Laws and the opening of Catholic churches in Belfast. The old thorn today may well bow down under the weight of its history.



fairy thorns

THE GENTRY TREE, KILREA



In contrast to fairy thorns standing alone in open fields, this is a town centre tree. Kilrea was developed under the Mercers Company as a local market town. In the 1770s mention was made of the 'Gentry Tree' (gentry being a euphemism for the special or fairy folk). When a wall was built around the Presbyterian Church in the 1840s the tree was saved. It now stands in a special raised bed which juts out from the church wall into the pavement. Passers-by almost have to duck to get under the thorn and the larger lime tree which now overhangs it almost smothering the little old thorn under its lush green foliage. A wire leash running from a metal collar around the thorn actually tethers it to this lime tree for support.

The thorn is bent, leaning out and over and up again. Its trunk is split open, with woodworm and wood-boring beetles resident in its old timber. But still the thorn bears leaves, flowers and berries. It has hardly changed in living memory.

THE CRAB TREE, ARDBOE

On the crest of a small hill on Battery Road, Ardboe, Co Tyrone close to the cross-roads known as Duffs Corner, is The Crab Tree. This low growing, multi-stemmed tree is held together and supported by binder twine tied to an old metal stake. It is a well

known local landmark on a small island of grass between the road and a parallel farm track. The hill has always been known as Crab Tree Hill and, although there does not appear to be any particular importance attached to the site, a local resident said that "no one would ever do anything to the tree".

There is another lone crab tree in a field at Ballyskeagh in the Lagan Valley between Belfast and Lisburn. It has been left with cultivated farmland all around. There are various Crab Tree Roads but few still have the crab apple trees after which they were named.



ST PATRICK'S WELL & CHAIR



The association of trees and wells is celebrated in various ways. Pieces of material - sometimes a small garment, like a glove, or a bandage from an injury - may be attached to a rag tree beside a well in a prayer for healing. The trees are always secondary in importance to the well, and may be small bushes or branches.

Holy wells have their own special atmosphere, nowhere more than at this site in the empty country south of the Clogher Valley. The well and 'chair', big rectangular blocks of sandstone, are tucked away in a deep double valley among forest planting.

The rags are not hung on the forest trees, but on nearby smaller trees of native species, the kind that would have been there long before the modern planting. Holly, rowan, even bilberry bushes, bear their rags hanging limply in the sheltered silence of the valley.

There are other more accessible wells and rag trees, for example by the castle at Dromore, Co. Tyrone, and at Dungiven Priory in Co Derry.



Dungiven Priory rag tree



The Cranfield well and rag tree

THE CRANFIELD WELL

At Cranfield on the northern shore of Lough Neagh is a most accessible rag tree. Like Ardboe on the southern shore, it is close to the shoreline beside the well-signed ruins of an old church, a scheduled historic monument which was once a monastic site.

Here the well is still in good order with a stone border within a wall and hedge enclosure. The rag trees associated with it are hawthorn and hazel. The well is venerated still, and is the focus for an annual outdoor Mass in summertime when the blessing of the boats is carried out.

This well has many legends. The water deposits 'stones' which crystallise out on the stone sides of the well. (Lough Neagh water is highly silicaceous - timber left in the lough petrifies, becomes stone-like).

Around the 29th June the water rises: this is the same date as that for the historic rising of water in the now dry well at Legar Hill, Armagh. In Christian terms it marks the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, once a Holy Day of Obligation but the day must have more ancient origins.

The rising water at Cranfield lifts these special stones to the surface and over the edge where they may be gathered. It is said that swallowing a stone will protect the person from drowning - a valuable protection for fishermen on the tricky waters of Lough Neagh. The waters of the well had healing properties especially for women in childbirth.

rag trees

RATHS AND MOUNDS

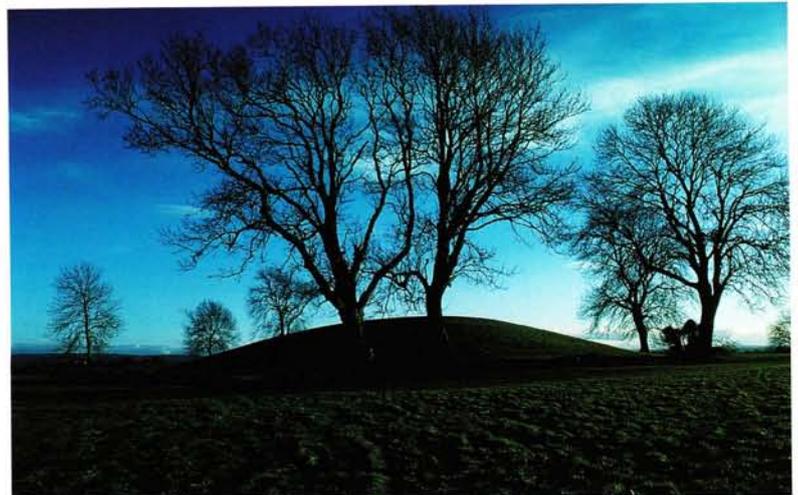
Hilltop raths are Ireland's most common field monument. They date from the early centuries AD and were used to protect a house, its buildings, people and livestock in a safe enclosure. It is likely that the earthen bank was made stock proof by planting blackthorn, hawthorn, or gorse. If cut branches were used, these might have carried seeds which would then grow into a living barrier, particularly once the rath was abandoned and stock no longer nibbled the young growth. The bushes and trees which mark such raths today may be the living descendants of those original bushes.

Inauguration sites of ancient tribal kings may be adorned by trees. Tullyhogue near Stewartstown in Co. Tyrone was the crowning place of one of our greatest tribes, the O'Neills, and is now itself crowned by a fine mix of trees. It stands proud above a landscape that once was wooded, now productive improved agricultural land.

It is said that trees here were destroyed in a tribal reprisal raid - cutting the enemies' trees was no doubt symbolic of toppling greater power - but they were re-planted.



Tullyhogue Fort, nr Cookstown, Co Tyrone

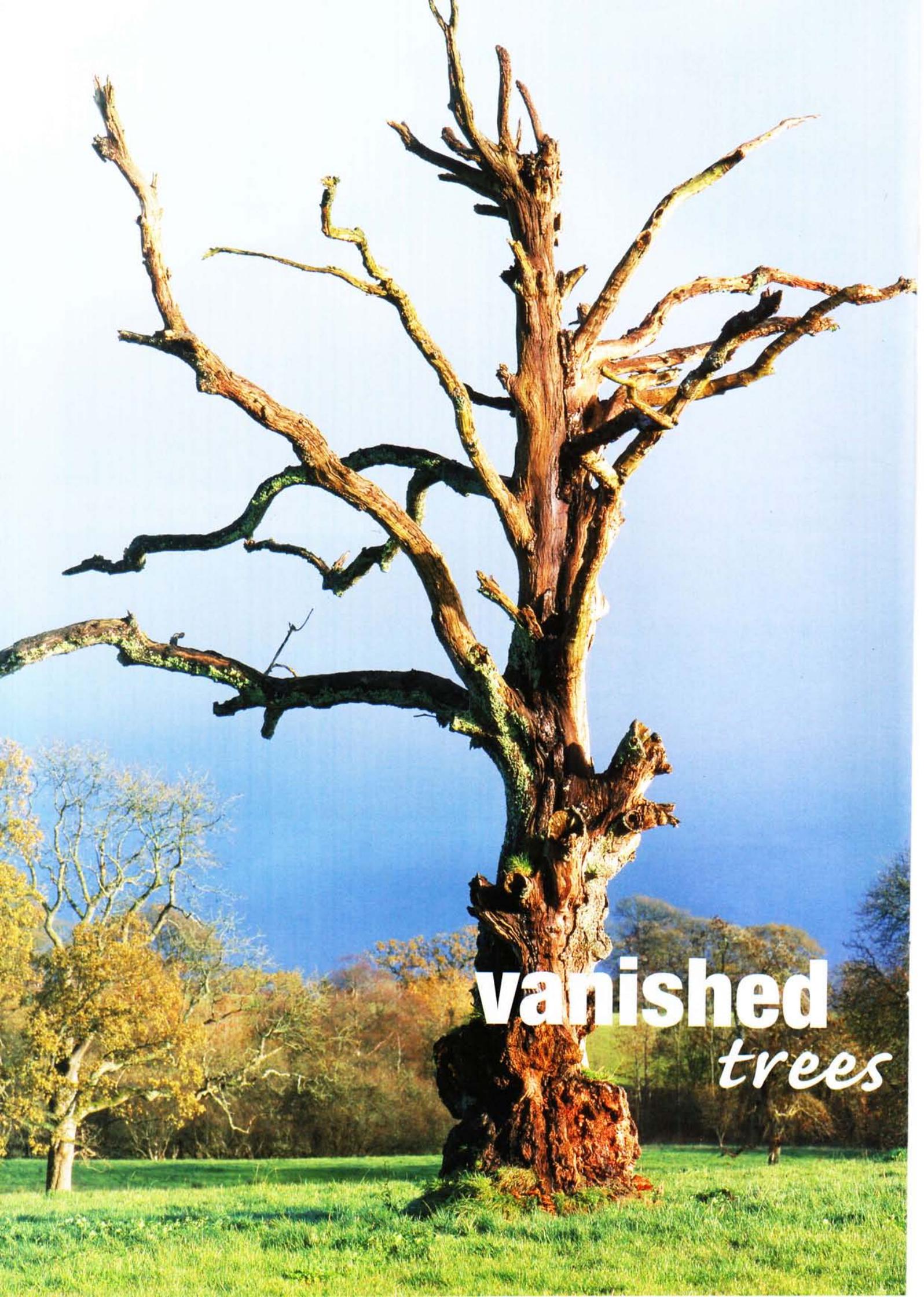


The Navan Fort, Co Armagh (sycamores)

raths



Rough Fort, Risk, Co Down (Infra-red photograph by Tony Corey)



vanished
trees

Throughout the research for this book, there were endless tales of trees that had gone. Lost from towns and villages, roadside and field, anything from an individual tree to a whole wood.

Lisnaskea moat

The site known as 'The Moat' on a hill beside Lisnaskea was the inauguration site of the local Maguire chieftains.

The central feature is a stone capped mound rising steeply from a level circular area, bordered by a low bank which drops to surrounding fields at a lower level. The bank is marked by natural hawthorn, ash, holly, ivy, with spring flowers of primroses. A few bluebells grow at the base of the mound, indicating a site of old woodland.

Local tradition holds that this was the only 'royal' site to be wooded from ancient times: what is now level improved agricultural land all around the mound was once the site of fine trees. During the First World War, when demand for timber was high, a Mr Brown (factor at Florence Court) got possession of the trees. The Maguires refused him permission to take the timber out over the ground which surrounded the historic site. He attempted to do so, and the subsequent legal case went all the way to the House of Lords - he lost. Nor did he profit from the timber - some which had been loaded onto a train was sidelined at Lisbellaw and rotted in a railway siding, more was left to decay on site.

This is a particularly well documented case of ill fortune from felling 'protected' trees. There are many other stories, up to very recent years. In one case it was believed that even removing fallen timber from a rath (near Comber, Co. Down) has caused illness in cattle.

Legar Hill, Armagh

The old well and rag tree at this hilltop site on the edge of Armagh have been overtaken by events, and by houses.

The well has been vandalised and filled with rubbish: although an elder tree thrives only the stump remains of the old hawthorn. Once this was a fine spreading tree, its branches bedecked with rags and bearing pennies hammered into its bark. However, there is still veneration and care from at least one local resident who acts as unofficial guardian of the well. It is hoped that further houses nearby may contribute to the well's restoration.



The Post Office Tree

The 'Post Office' tree no longer exists, its site in a field beside Prehen House outside Derry City, marked only by nettles and brambles. The tree was a sycamore, and a group of other sycamores in the same field helps to keep the memory alive.

The tale associated with the tree is one of the darker stories of Irish landowners. The daughter of the

house, Miss Knox, was courted by one of the Macnaghtens of Co. Antrim - surreptitious letters were exchanged by 'posting' them in the sycamore tree.

The family was concerned, and father attempted to carry the daughter away to Dublin and safety. Their coach was stopped by the furious Macnaghten, who claimed that Miss Knox had promised to marry him - it is said that she only acquiesced if her father would give permission, which we may assume he did not.

The story has two variants - one is that the villain of the piece attempted to shoot the father; and that the daughter was shot in error, throwing herself in front of her father, in order to save him. The other is grimmer - that Macnaghten shot her deliberately, determined that if he could not have her, no-one else should do so.

He was arrested, taken to Strabane, tried and executed - but the first hanging failed and he survived. Declaring that he had no wish to be known as 'half-hung Macnaghten' he insisted that the noose should be made ready again - and this time he was truly hanged. He is of course remembered to this day by the nickname he had coined for himself. Around Prehen, the tradition of the 'post office' tree survives, outliving its subjects.

On its way out - a dead elm hangs on in a field behind Old Crom Castle, Co Fermanagh.

THE 'PIN TREE', ARDBOE

One of the famous wishing trees was the 'pin tree' at Ardboe old church on the West shore of Lough Neagh. The most recent tree blew down in the fierce wind of Christmas Eve 1997. It had been dead for some time - probably no tree could survive for long the metal pressed or hammered into its trunk, once 'pins' or nails, now coins.

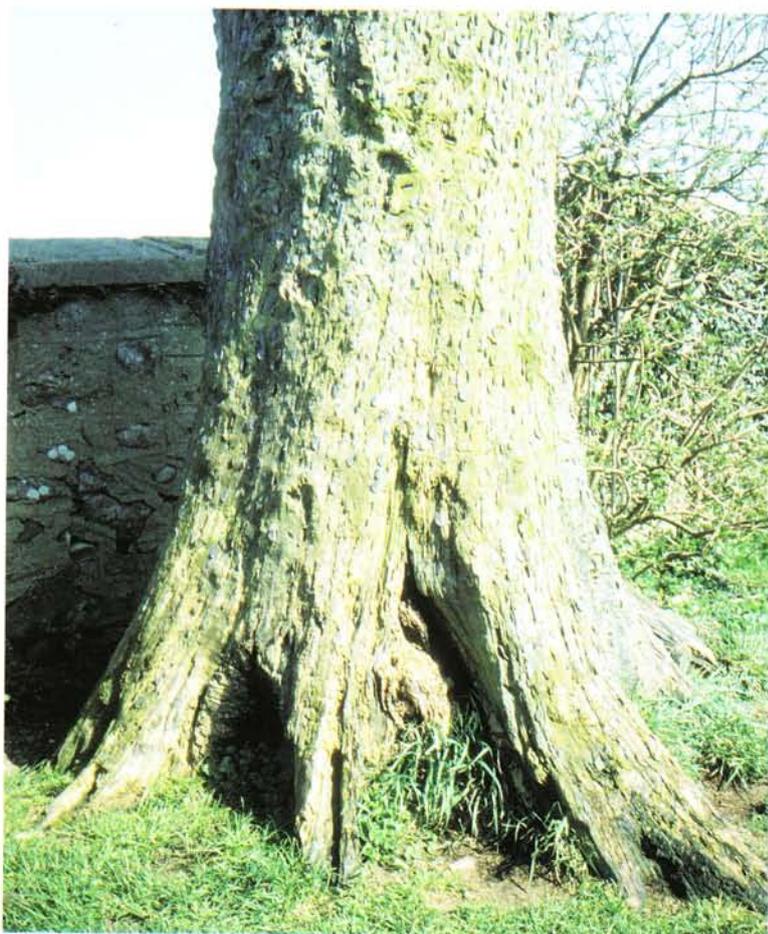
Two new beeches were planted in 1998 as replacements. Although not native, beech had been used for previous pin trees, and there is another beech beside the fine medieval carved cross at Ardboe churchyard, which was a monastic

foundation.

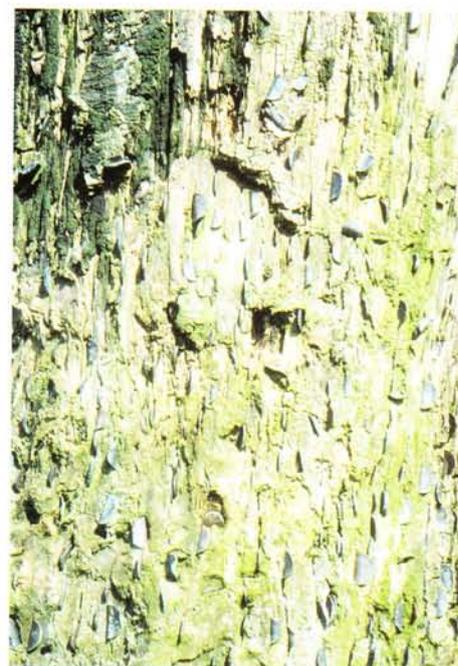
There is local tradition of transference of significance from an original well which dried, to water gathered in a tree planted beside the well, and the belief has been maintained through a succession of trees. The site at Ardboe was the focus for worship during penal days when the saying of Mass was not permitted. It also has a Lammas or harvest pilgrimage in August, a tradition which has been revived. A hundred years ago, this was a major local event, with stalls set up, and activities lasting for several days.



The tree had been dead long before it was blown down



The Pin Tree, Ardboe, in 1990.



The pins embedded in the trunk

The “Ball of Fire”

Central to the arboretum in Tollymore Forest Park is all that remains of a once mighty tree. It was a Wellingtonia, at 100 feet the tallest tree in the place. It is now a massive tall spiky stump.

About 2 o'clock in the afternoon on 12th October 1988 a freak electrical storm swept over the Mourne Mountains. The tall tree attracted the core of the electricity - it was like a bomb explosion, a 'ball of fire' which engulfed the tree and literally blew it apart. Stones and a manhole cover from the ground nearby were flung into the car park many yards away, people inside vehicles felt the impact, electricity and telephones were knocked out. Fortunately no one was hurt, but the shock was tremendous. The stump remains to remind us of the force of the natural world.



The De Lorean Fairy Tree

One of the many vanished fairy thorns, but this was better known than most and has earned an international notoriety. The thorn was known to generations of mill workers in Dunmurry, once a centre for the linen industry. It was said that mill girls on their way to an early shift had actually seen the fairies dancing beneath it.

Enter modern industry, and John De Lorean's proposals for a new factory to produce the ultimate sports car. The thorn was in the way. Local workers refused to destroy the tree - outsiders had to be brought in. Some of the executives were American, ready to accept local belief in the thorn and the dangers of harming it so when the final commercial failure came there were people on both sides of the Atlantic ready to tell the tale; and suggest that the venture was ill fated from the start; modern entrepreneurs are not immune to old magic.

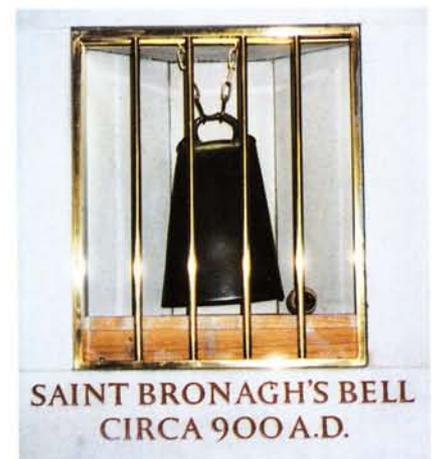
Saint Bronagh's Bell

Long ago in Rostrevor there was an uncanny happening. Regularly, on stormy nights when local seafarers might be at risk on Carlingford Lough or the open Irish sea, a bell was heard ringing gently and sweetly. No source could be found, though the sound came from the old graveyard. Then came the 'night of the big storm' in 1839 when hundreds of trees the length and breadth of Ireland were swept away. In Rostrevor, a tree fell and split apart. Within the wood of the branches was the bell.

The history was that the bell had

belonged to Saint Bronagh who founded a Convent at Kilbroney, Rostrevor. The bell, hung between the branches of a tree - species not recorded, but probably a yew - summoned the sisters to prayer. As years went by, the convent vanished. The tree remained, the bell kept secret within its branches until the growth had hidden it completely. After the fall of the tree, the bell was taken to Newry and used as a mass bell there but after some years it went missing. It was tracked down by the persistence of one Sister of Mercy, reclaimed and restored to the parish of Kilbroney in 1885. It was at first used as a mass bell, but is now stored safely behind bars in a niche in the South Transept of the lovely Catholic church in Rostrevor. The tongue was removed long ago, and an external striker is supplied so that the sweet tone of this Celtic bell may still be heard.

It is over a thousand years since St. Bronagh's bell was first struck, and for hundreds of years it was enfolded in the embrace of a living tree, protected until it once again saw the light of day and took its place in the Church again.



**SAINT BRONAGH'S BELL
CIRCA 900 A.D.**



apples
and pears

Trees which produce sweet edible fruit have been precious since early man first foraged for food, and are associated with ancient sites. At Navan Fort archaeologists found the oldest Irish apple, dated to 1,100 B.C.

THE ANCIENT APPLE TREES OF ARMAGH

Many old varieties of apple and pear have been lost but there is increased interest in preserving those that remain.

Keegan Crab, Barnhill Pippin, Golden Nobel and Ballyfatten, all planted around 1880, may still be found in the MacNeice orchards beside Address House in Armagh. Other old trees survive beside farmhouses, sometimes kept as much for their Spring blossom as for their fruit - old pear trees may bear small fruit but their white flowers are a joy.

There are now strenuous efforts to establish orchards of the old trees with their wonderful colour, flavour and texture of fruit. Often they were more frost hardy and flower later than the widespread bramley. Not only were apples eaten raw or cooked; special types were used for cider, a tradition which has disappeared. The Caledon cider apple from Caledon and Tynan on the Armagh/Tyrone border is believed to have been developed at the local Franciscan Friary: it has a red skin with pink-tinged flesh and must have made beautiful apple juice and cider.



This apple tree, planted in the 1880s, still bears fruit today



Apple blossom

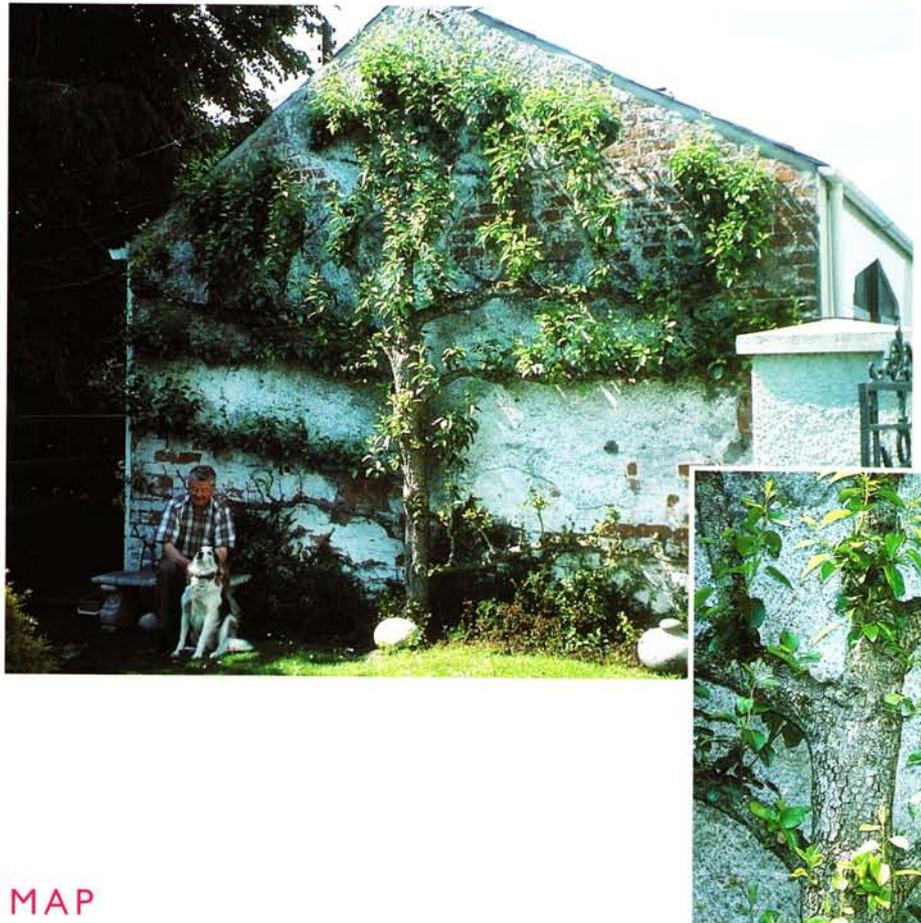


Peadhar MacNeice in the red cider orchard at Address, Co Armagh

THE PRECISION PEAR

At Brookhall Open Farm outside Lisburn, a remarkable pear survives, known to be over 100 years old: it was planted when the buildings were erected in the 1870's. What makes it remarkable is that it is an espaliered specimen, grown tight against the gable-end wall of farm buildings, and has been severely pruned for all those years.

It is an artificial form, but the pear is quite happy. It renews itself with strong shoots and glossy green leaves each year, with white blossom which sets pears so long as the Spring weather is kind and the bees are out and about to assist pollination.



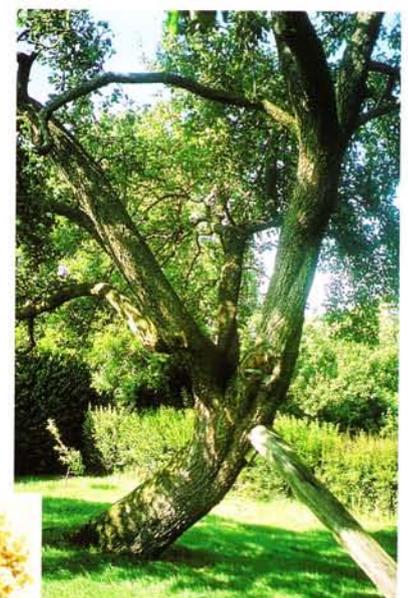
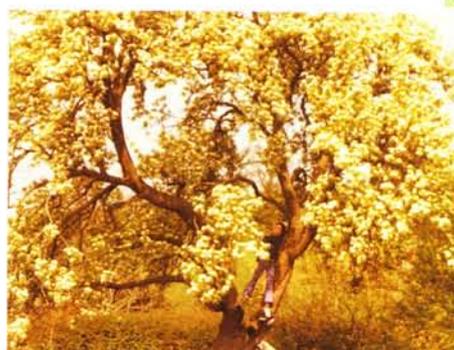
THE PEAR TREE ON THE MAP

In a rural area of Co. Down between Saintfield and Ballynahinch is a Peartree Road, with a Peartree farm and the very pear tree after which both were named. Marked on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps of the 1830's, this local hero of a pear tree is still alive and well.

The trunk leans mossily upon its support, a railway sleeper angled from the ground against the bark which is growing around it. Above, several big strong branches reach up, above the old plum and apple trees which accompany

the pear in the orchard. So many of these orchards have been lost, but here old varieties like Gladstone, Irish Peach and Kemp have been retained - and still bear good fruit.

The big pear tree is well over 30' high. A daughter pear planted in an adjoining orchard is now around 20' high. The pears are pressed for pear juice by the tree's owner, who surely deserves this sweet produce in return for the care given to the tree.



(Left) The pear tree in blossom in the 1970s (photo courtesy of Mrs Joan Metcalfe)

WILD CHERRIES OF NAVAN

Beside the ancient royal site of Navan at Armagh is the mysterious pool known as the King's stables. Whether or not a king kept his horses here, it is known to be a ritual pool into which offerings were thrown and from which treasure has been recovered. Around the pool, now somewhat choked by aquatic vegetation, is a bank crowned by cherry trees. These are ancient trees, with wide trunks and spreading branches, shading the pool and adding to its atmosphere of quiet and mystery.



The King's Stables in April

THE EXPANSIVE PEAR

On a farm near Carrickfergus in the shelter of the Knockagh is the biggest pear tree of them all and an amazing survivor.

At first glance it seems to be an entire orchard, not a single tree. Half a dozen trunks raise their pale downy leaves, a mass of flowers early in the year, and a crop of small sweet pears which are very edible though they do not last well.

This whole grove springs from a single tree. Well over a century ago the pear tree was already old and very large.

Because it appeared to be about to split apart and collapse, special metal hawsers were brought from Carrickfergus shipyard, from the last ship launched there, and these were used to support the tree.

Great metal bolts were driven right

through the trunk and branches, then tied by the hawsers to a mighty stone and to surrounding trees.

The pear tree split apart in spite of these efforts, branches falling in all directions. However, this was anything but the end of the story. As the branches lay upon the ground, they drew nourishment from it, grew new roots, and behaved like new trunks.

This is the pear tree that absolutely refuses to lie down and die.

What looks like an orchard is a single pear tree!





trees
of character

Trees of character have some special features of their own - and add to their surroundings.

ABOUT YEWS AT LOUGHGALL

The yew walk is an amazing feature of the garden at Loughall, the house and grounds owned by the Department of Agriculture but part now open to the public. The walk dates from around 1685 and the founding of the estate.

The yews here are not clipped, but are free-growing trees of spreading form. Two or three rows of yew trees line a wide walk, quiet and beautiful. Some of the inner trees have grown tall and straight, almost pine-like. Some lean inwards over the centre path. Some are single-stemmed, some have divided into multiple trunks. At the outer edges, trees have grown low and spreading, reaching towards the light. Some have smooth bark, some twisted, some look smooth and simple in form, some

complex like multiple columns.

Every one appears different, and every one is special.

There is a notion that yews are somewhat lifeless - this is far from the truth. Birds feed and nest in them, at Loughall grey squirrels breed. The woodland floor is by no means bare, carpeted in one area with the woodland flower wood sanicle.

Part of the deal when the house went into public ownership was that the yew walk be maintained and if trees failed that they would be replaced with seedlings from the original trees. This has been done - young trees were found ready and waiting when they were needed as replacements.



The yew walk



The entrance avenue of limes at Loughall

Lime avenues were a feature of grand country houses throughout Ireland, and a splendid one was planted to enhance the Parliament buildings at Stormont. The grounds are open to all, and the best time to see the limes must surely be autumn....

A FINE NUT TREE

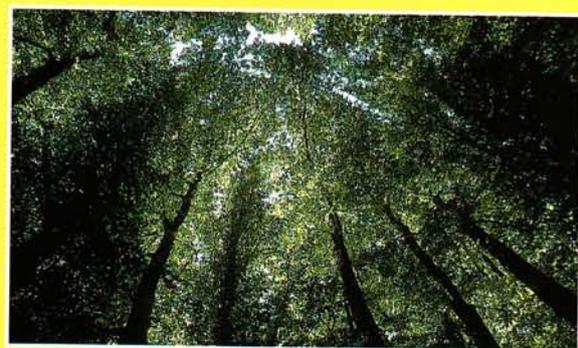
Walnut trees have a distinctive shape and form, and are easy to spot in late Spring or early Summer because they come into leaf very late. When the leaves first open they are dark in colour and have an apple-like smell. It was believed that the scent kept flies away: walnut trees were planted in the yard at Lissan House near Cookstown where carriage horses were changed. Walnuts are not rare but many old trees have been lost in recent years. There are two fine specimens in Armagh outside the old workhouse, several near Castlewellan and in Belfast. The largest may be the walnut with a girth of 11' 5" in the garden of Allan Lodge in Seaforde village, Co. Down (this is a private house but the tree may be seen from the main road and footpath).

In good cropping years, the Seaforde walnut bears hundred of nuts. Enclosed in green cases, the walnut shells harden and inside is the twin nut with its curious brain-like convoluted shape. They taste delicious.



This is a terrific name for a group of trees, but a bit of a puzzle, because there are 14 of them. Just off the Belfast Road into Crumlin, in Parkfield, are a group of extra tall limes. Planted in a circle, the 14 trees were probably from the same stock and all have grown evenly tall and straight up to the light.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES AT CRUMLIN

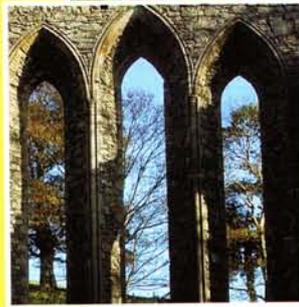
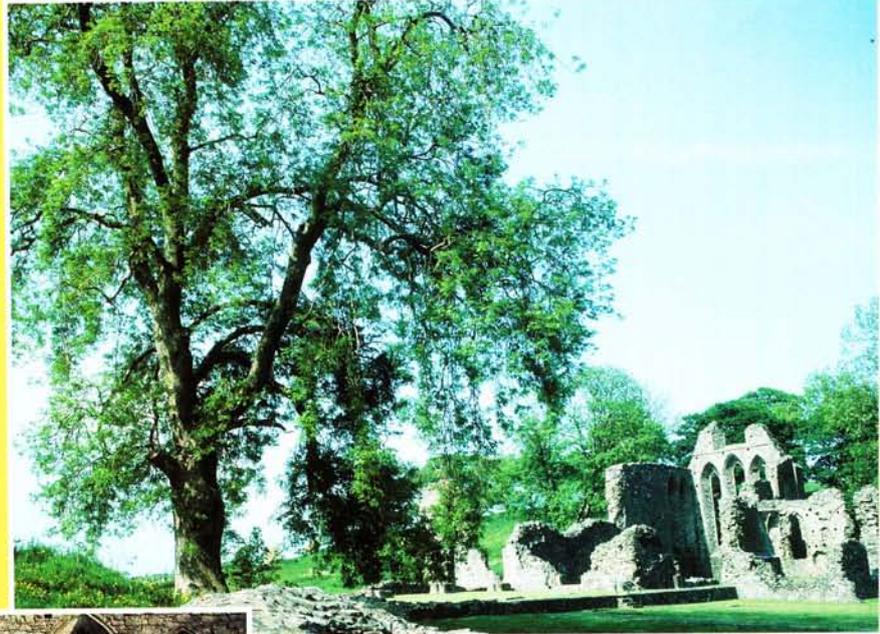


The centre of this grove is shaded, ground vegetation suppressed to almost nothing. Outside the circle the grass grows rank and tall with nettles and other 'weed' species. A little judicious trimming would make the limes look even taller and grander. In a village of many trees, these are a special group. They are protected by a TPO inspired by adjacent new house building.

THE ASH BY THE ABBEY

Beside the river, on fertile soil of the river flood plain but slightly raised on the high ground that forms the Inch - an island - is the typical setting for ruins of a Cistercian abbey. At Inch, Downpatrick, the ruins of John de Courcy's foundation lie quiet and still, away from the bustle of the town. For many visitors, the fine ruins are enhanced by this setting and also the trees which accompany them. One tree is especially magnificent, a great ash slightly weeping in its form, with lower branches sweeping down to form a beautiful tree profile.

It stands before the main entrance to the abbey church, a living guardian of the deserted aisles and cloisters. Within the trunk, holes shelter various nests and possibly one of the rarest of Northern Ireland's birds, the barn owl. These 'white owls' are seen rarely, but this side of Downpatrick, Inch and Finnebrogue, with their woodland and the Quoile river, is an area where they are known to be still resident.



THE SOURCE TREE

Mount Caulfield House in Bessbrook Co. Armagh is the home of an astonishing ash tree. In one of the paddocks is a large ash, at first sight tall, broad (21' 6" round) and strong, a fine tree - but there are others like it.

Walk round and its special nature is revealed. The large, slightly twisted, single trunk may be seen as two sections, rising from the ground to join forces over a gap, from which emerges a steady flow of water. The effect is remarkable. Above the water there is a space - once used as a secret place by children in which to hide treasures, also used by a fox as his lair.

There used to be a mill close by, now ruined, and the mill race may be connected with this tree-embraced stream. Never mind the explanation, this ash has a touch of magic.



THE ALDER STATESMAN OF BREEN

In ancient Ireland, sections of alder trunks were used as shields - the wood does not shatter when struck. These were big trunks, and no alders now growing are as big. The trees seem to grow faster, but live for fewer years and never reach the size of giants of old.

The nearest is perhaps an old alder in Breen National Nature Reserve, a natural oak woodland in North Antrim near Armoy. Beside a pond

at the entrance is one immense alder, well past its prime but still a fine tree.

Its girth is difficult to measure, since the trunk is clothed in small branches from this tree and associated holly, rowan, and sycamore all growing around or out of the old tree. Ferns and mosses cling to its bark. Including all this, the circumference is over 20' - almost fit for an ancient shield.



THE ARMADA TREE

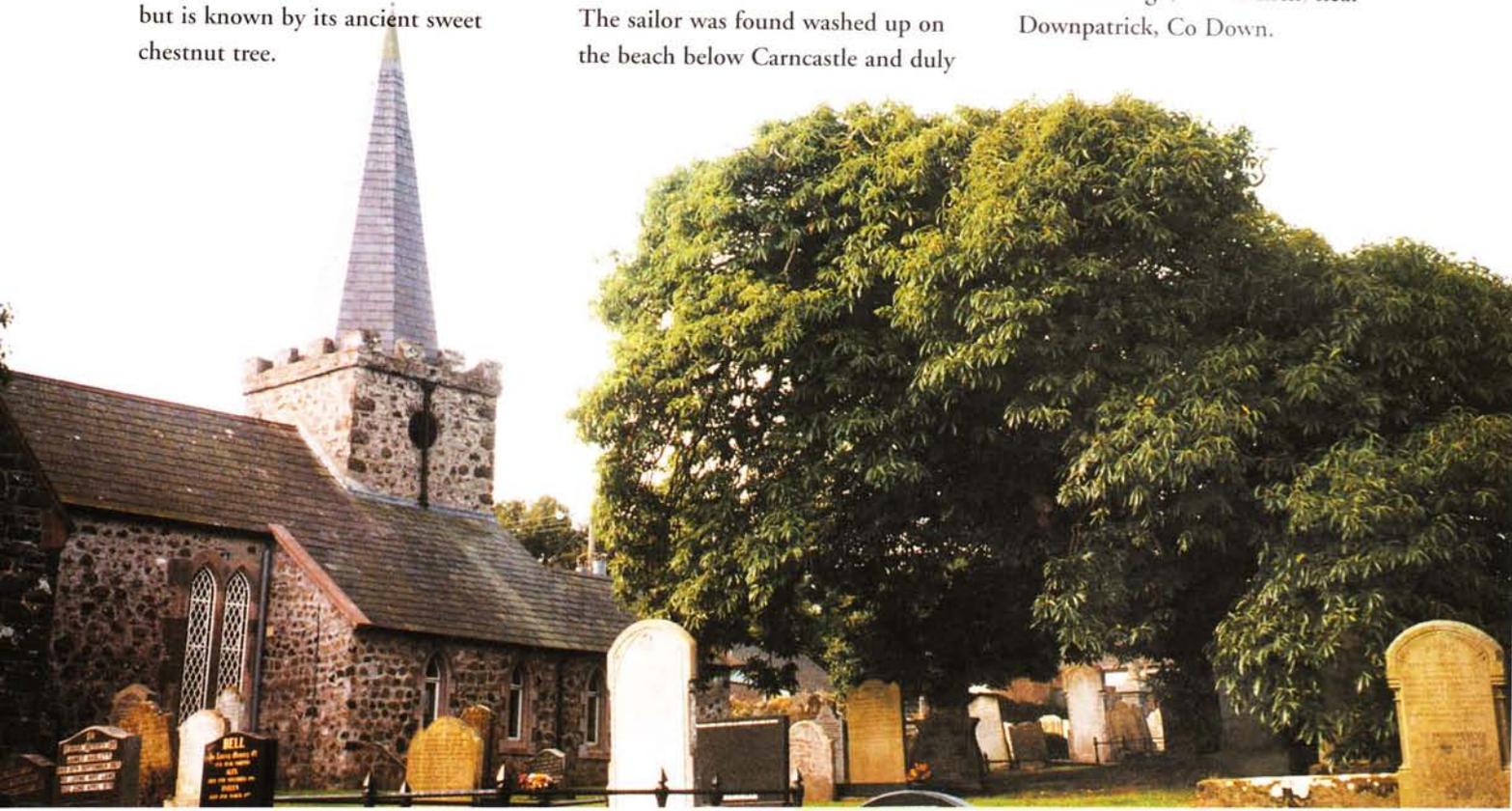
Churchyards have many lovely trees, some commemorating famous people and often with good stories.

At Carncastle, above Larne, with views of the Antrim coast below and the hills behind, there is a picturesque church on an ancient ecclesiastical site. Among the many graves, one is unmarked by a stone but is known by its ancient sweet chestnut tree.

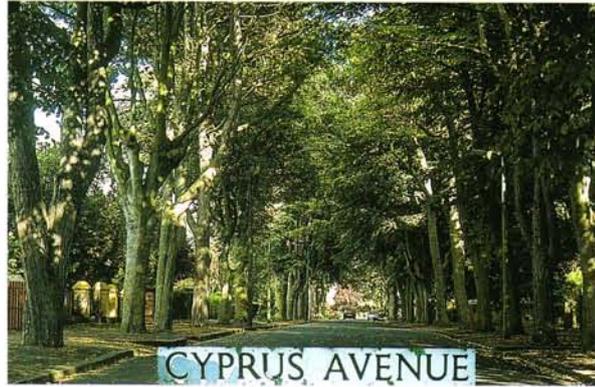
The grave is reputed to be the burying place of a sailor from one of the fine ships of the Spanish Armada, blown off course by gales and wrecked on the southern Antrim coast. Its sister ship the Girona reached the north coast only to founder in its turn, and leave precious relics now housed in the Ulster Museum.

The sailor was found washed up on the beach below Carncastle and duly

buried in the churchyard. In his pocket were some nuts, seeds of his native sweet chestnut. After his death, one germinated, and in spite of cool coastal winds on this upland site it has grown to the venerable tree which can be seen today. Other fine churchyard chestnuts can be seen at Aghalurcher (Colebrooke) Co Fermanagh, and at Inch, near Downpatrick, Co Down.

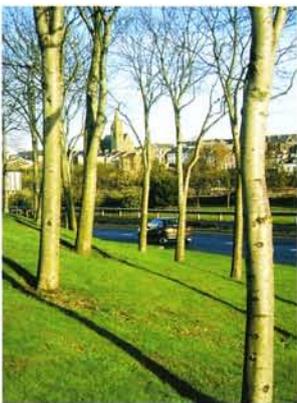


DOWN ON CYPRUS AVENUE....

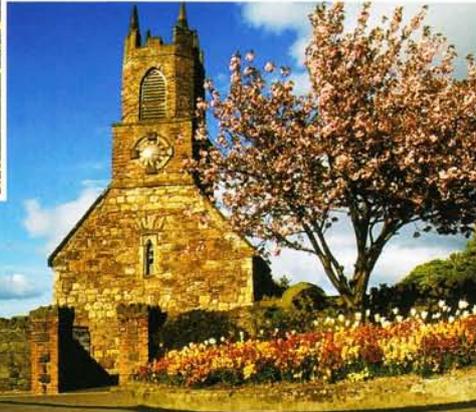


The Cyprus Avenue of Van Morrison's tribute to East Belfast in the 70s does not refer to an avenue of cypresses at all, but of pines. What is more, it is CYPRUS Avenue. The pines still make a spectacular setting in this landmark of musical history.

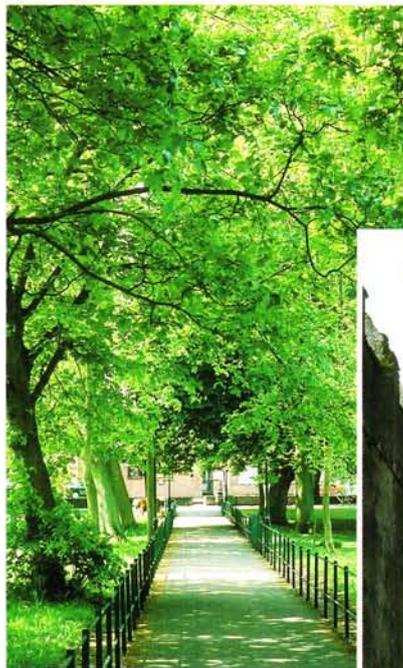
With the development of suburban houses and gardens around towns in the Victorian era, exotic trees and shrubs were very fashionable. Some original specimens still thrive and delight us - Winter-flowering *Prunus* and the range of white and pink cherries and magnolias catch the eye in Spring time. In recent years, many new planting schemes have been carried out to enhance our urban environment. Street trees are more widespread than they used to be. Among the new planting in city squares, there may be young trees which will grow into the landmark trees of the future.



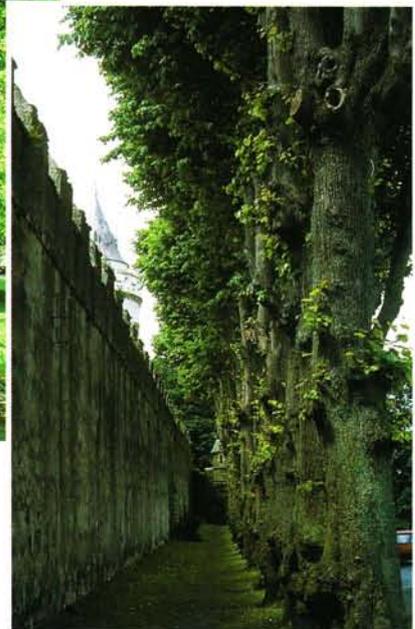
Roadside planting in Londonderry



Many cherries were planted after the Second World War to add colour to the dreary post-war urban scene. The one beside the old priory in Holywood, Co. Down, is old and has become a local landmark.



Armagh Mall is a classic green space with landmark trees, planned in the period of the elegant Georgian town houses, churches, and museum built around it, with courthouse at the north end and old gaol at the south. In earlier times it was common ground lying within a racecourse for horses.



Limes are a very common street tree, and a very fine single avenue of limes was planted beside Killyleagh Castle in Co Down.

street trees



champions

These are trees that have been formally recognised as the tallest or broadest of their kind.

THE GIANTS OF CASTLEWELLAN

The original 5 hectare walled garden at Castlewellan was founded in 1740. The nineteenth century arboretum planted by the Annesley family has been extended by the Forest Service to about 40 ha. It now has so many champion trees that it really needs an entire book to itself - it has to be visited. Here are just a few ...

The great redwood *Sequoiadendron giganteum* is grown in many parks and demesnes where it towers over lesser trees, tall, dark and definitely foreign. Native to the western USA it may live for hundreds of years and most Ulster specimens should have centuries before them.

The most gigantic of them all is in the arboretum at Castlewellan, standing beside formal steps near the entrance path.

Opposite is another giant, the Sierra Redwood, nearly as tall and measuring 22' 2" at chest height.

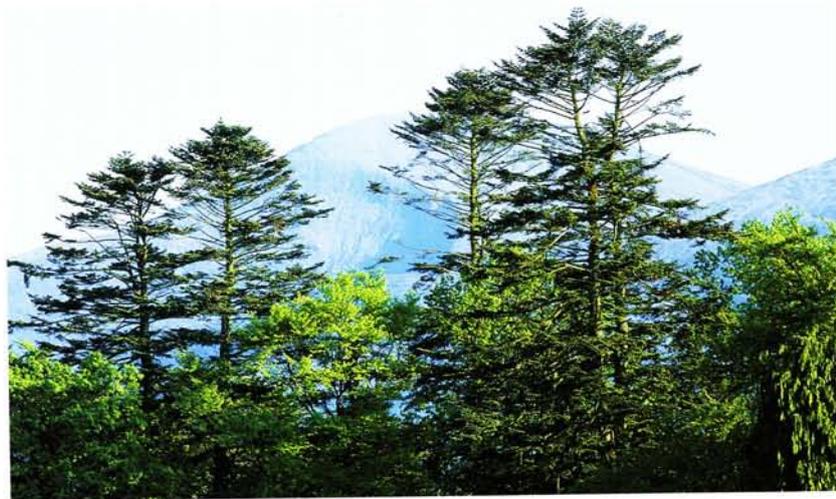
Beside the path is a fantastic tree which, if not checked, would take over the entire garden. A multi-stemmed

Sequoiadendron giganteum, the branches sweep out sideways, their weight bowing them down to touch the ground. There they form new trees, gradually widening their range until an entire group of trees spreads onward and outwards.

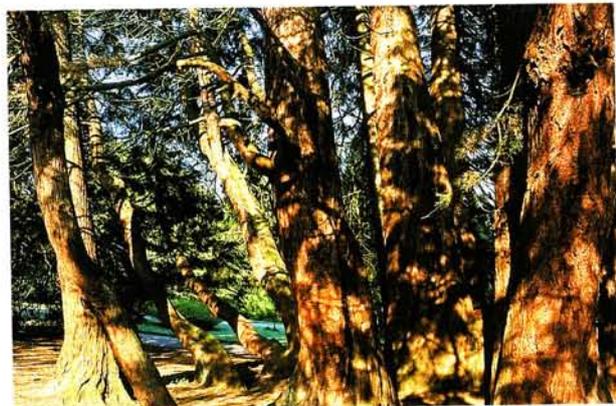
Famous - or should it be notorious - is the original Castlewellan Gold,

Cupressocyparis leylandii Castlewellan.

This is the source of the thousands of cuttings planted throughout Ulster as over-sized hedges, alien in the rural landscape. They may start as little bushes but they do not stop at shrub size and are quite capable of growing into large trees, fast. The original was spotted as a seedling, nurtured and sheltered.



The arboretum skyline with the Mourne Mountains



The multi-stemmed *Sequoiadendron giganteum*



Among the champions are some early examples of ornamental maples, this one underplanted with snowdrop and bluebell.

Planted in 1854, Castlewellan's Wellingtonia now has a girth of 26' 10" at chest height, larger towards its massive base, and is about 120' tall



The Downhill spruce



The Tempo spruce

TWO MIGHTY SPRUCE

Downhill Wood is now Forest Service land, its entrance opposite the Bishop's Gate of the National Trust Downhill property near Castlerock on the North Coast. Once in the forest, a path leads down towards a group of old conifers planted when the wood was still part of the Downhill demesne.

One is a huge sitka spruce, 21' 2" around its mossy trunk. Leaning gently away from the path, the lower branches appear dead, shaded out by those above, but look up and the vigorous living middle branches are in fine form. The very top of the tree is not happy - having grown so far, it is above the general tree level and exposed to the North Coast winds.

The tallest spruce is slightly slimmer than the Downhill tree with a girth of 20' 2" but its top is in good order and it is still growing. This one is beside the entrance to Tempo Manor in Co Fermanagh, one of three planted around 1846.

Tempo is sheltered, with good free draining soil which suits most tree species. Many were planted in threes - three Sitka spruce, three Sequoia, three cedars, three Douglas fir, three silver firs and three monkey puzzles.

Although private, the garden is open on a regular basis and special interest groups may contact the owner John Langham for information.

Sitka spruce has been scorned as the 'ordinary' tree of commercial forestry but it is a fine tree in its own right. Early examples were planted as ornamental specimens.

THE TALL SCOT

This tree was admired by Thomas Pakenham, author of the wonderful book 'Meetings With Remarkable Trees'. The pine *Pinus sylvestris* stands among woodland in the valley of the great Baronscourt estate in west Tyrone. The champion pine was planted with other ornamental species when the lake side drive and gardens were landscaped. Over the years, it vanished from sight, submerged in a mini-forest of natural regeneration from a Western Hemlock planted nearby. Some years ago, this dense growth was thinned, and the pine rediscovered. It is now revealed in all its glory; shelter and rich soil have combined to produce a fine tall tree with a vigorous canopy.

Baronscourt has many other treasures: a wonderful Cedar of Lebanon thought to be 220 years old stands guard near the house; rare magnolia flower in the woods around the lake; the woods are home to scarce plants, lichens and animals including a good red squirrel population. There is a well-known garden centre on the main entrance road, and the grounds are open on occasion. Groups wishing to visit should contact the estate office.

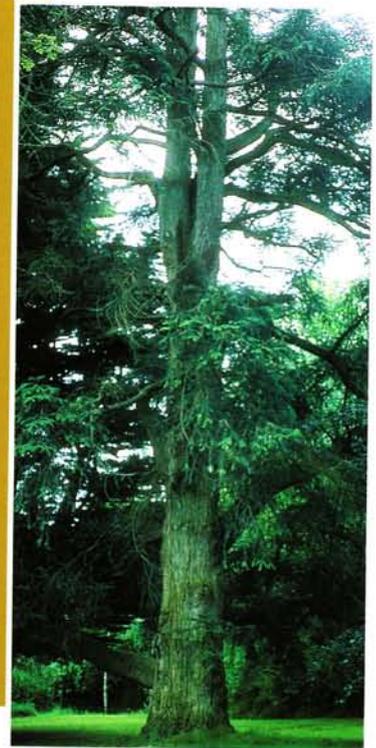


AN ELEGANT FIR AT GOSFORD

The arboretum at Gosford Forest seems somewhat underestimated. It contains some lovely specimen trees, well spaced in a quiet grassy setting without too much formality. The forest also has formal gardens, open parkland, forestry, a collection of poultry, rare breeds such as Soay sheep, and red deer clearly visible in their enclosure. The arboretum champion is a fir *Abies spectabilis*, in the record books at the greatest girth for this species. Extremely

tall, it is 13' 10" round and in excellent health. It is the sort of tree that justifies forest arboreta, providing an opportunity to appreciate a species not commonly grown, and here allowed to reach full maturity.

This champion is accompanied by a group of veteran Douglas Firs, growing old and craggy with carbuncled bark, typical of their age. Are these also close to champion size?



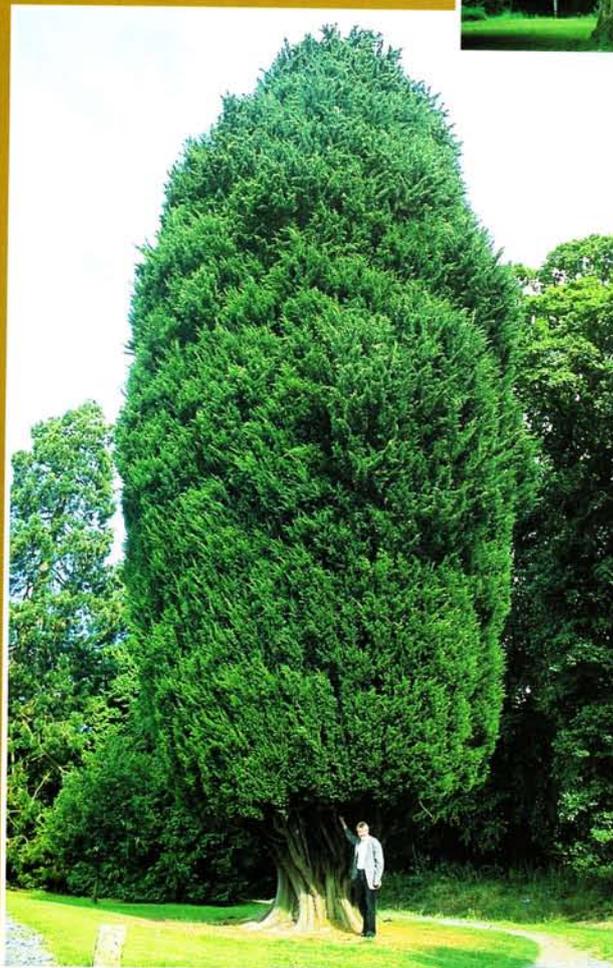
THE EVER YOUNG STAR OF CLANDEBOYE

One for the record books is a rather special Monterey cypress *Cupressus macrocarpa*, the tallest in Northern Ireland. The tree has retained its youthful 'fastigate' form. Thomas Pakenham, author of 'Meetings with Remarkable Trees' has named it *Cupressus macrocarpa* Clandeboye.

Tall, dark, and elegant, this tree, like an ageing film star, has maintained a slim upright figure in spite of advancing age. It contrasts with more relaxed neighbouring trees which have let themselves go a bit.

Much of the Clandeboye estate is private, though visited by special groups of tree and garden enthusiasts by appointment. The film star tree, however, stands just outside the archway into Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland's premises, and so may be appreciated by all those joining a CVNI event or course.

There are a number of trees of this species in an around Clandeboye. One was spirited away by an estate worker to his cottage which is now part of the Blackwood golf course - sadly this blew down in the great gale of Boxing Day 1998.



John McClean beside the Monterey Cypress at Clandeboye

THE GIANT AT DRUM

Dramatic champion trees are to be found at Drum Manor Forest park near Cookstown. Drum is a relatively small forest park, meticulously well kept, with lakes, gardens, and a caravan site rated among the top 100 in the UK. It is based on the old Manor House, which only has walls and a tower remaining. What was once a grand ballroom is now a garden, with flowers, shrubs and even a bridge.

Right beside the car park and the remains of the Manor House is the vast Western Hemlock *Tsuga heterophylla*. It is the trunk that dominates, 23' 11" round with remarkable grey lattice or diamond patterned bark.

Above, a mass of branches bear heavy foliage in a huge tree which can only be appreciated by standing back and looking at it from the car park.

This giant of a Hemlock gives an overwhelming feeling of size and sheer bulk. In terms of buildings, it would be not so much a tall thin skyscraper as a tower block.



THE BROADEST BEECH



The eventual winner as biggest beech was this giant at Castle Coole in Co Fermanagh, which measured 21 feet around, but there is always the possibility that yet larger ones may yet be discovered. The Castle Coole beech was pollarded - this form of tree management means that large branches are cut back on a fairly mature tree, encouraging new growth of branches and a strengthening and thickening of the trunk.

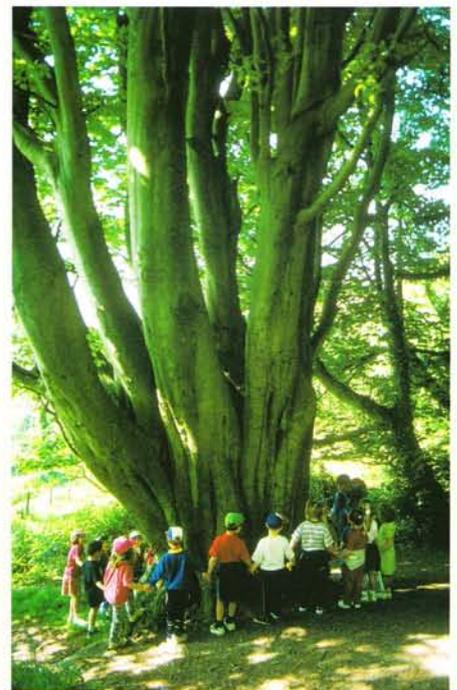
Previous contenders for the 'biggest beech' title included trees in the Armagh Observatory, roadside trees at Raholp, near Strangford, Co. Down, a beech in Killynether Wood at Scrabo Country Park, and a farm beech at Drumwhinny near Kesh in Co Fermanagh. These latter trees are believed to have been planted in the eighteenth century, making them at least 200 years old.



The Armagh Observatory beech.



The Drumwhinny beech in Co Fermanagh.



The Killynether beech in spring. Photograph by Connor Graham

THE CASTLE COOLE CHESTNUT



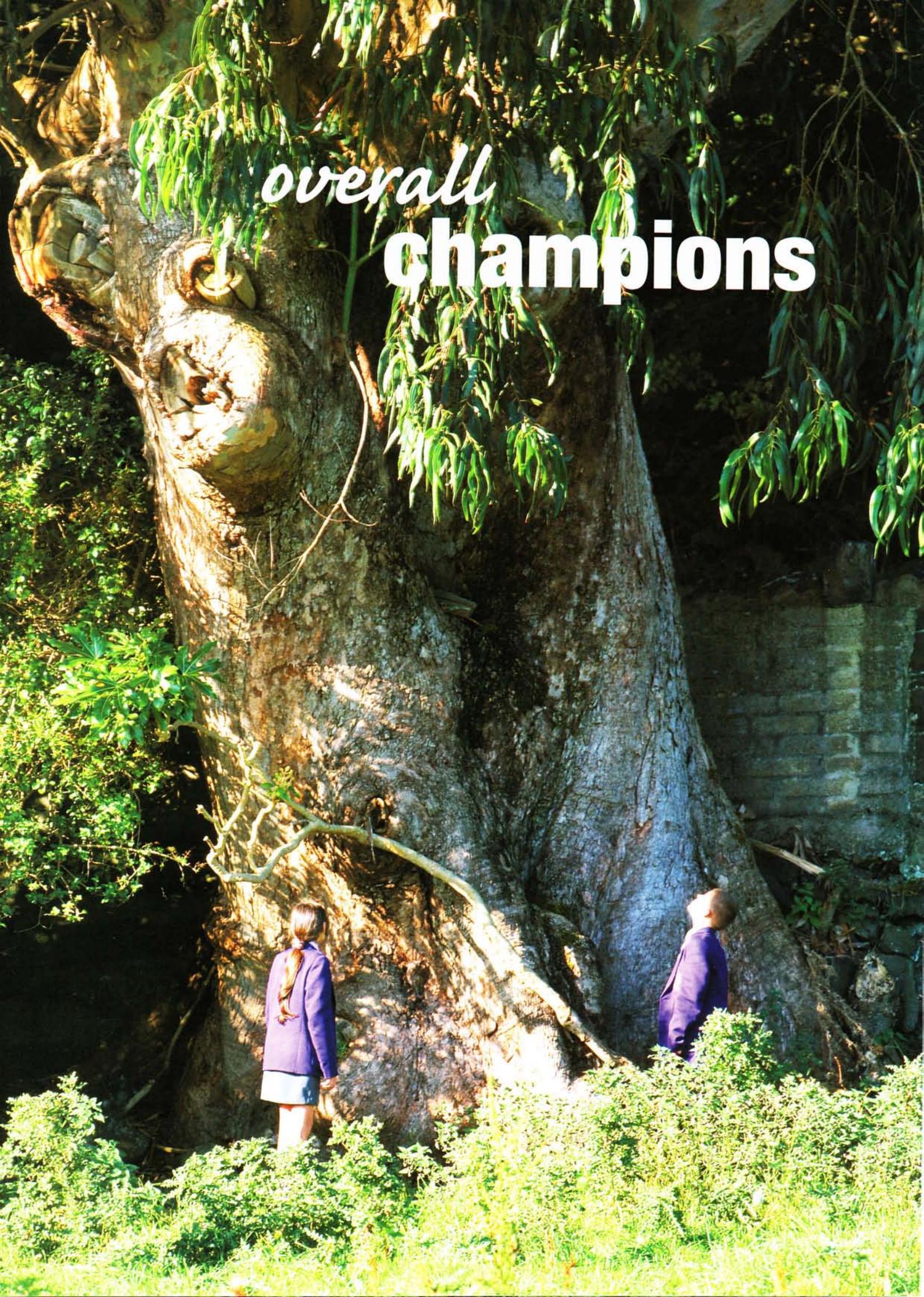
Castle Coole is a stately home which belongs to the National Trust, though the current Lord Belmore lives in a modern house in the grounds. Like their noble neighbours at Crom and Florencecourt, his ancestors took a real interest in trees.

One tree is a special giant. From the outside, this horse chestnut grows with others at the edge of the front lawn outside the restored facade of Castle Coole. Once inside the canopy an amazing structure is revealed.

The tree is a collection of massive branches, leaving the trunk at a low level. In the absence of grazing livestock, these branches have survived and behaved like new trees, growing up to form their own trunk, branches and canopy, larger than the original branches. The whole is a wonderland of moss covered branches. When the family was still resident and there were children growing up at Castle Coole a tree house was built in the tree - a few nails are all that remain today to mark a very favourite place.



overall
champions



This is an individual selection - which may be challenged - of tallest, broadest, oldest, most special trees.

AN AUSSIE IN ANTRIM

It is easy to say that the Antrim coast, rocky and windswept, is not good for trees. But turn off the East Antrim coast road and as soon as the glens provide shelter there are wonderful trees and stretches of woodland. Glenarm, Glengariff, are famous for their woods; the roads inland towards Ballymena are lined with trees.

One loop off the coast road leads past St. MacNissi's College, the school housed in Garron Tower at Garron Point.

Among the trees is one, planted in 1857, which is now a real champion. Right beside the boundary wall of the school, overhanging the road, is a eucalyptus, *Eucalyptus globulus* a blue gum from Australia. The full size of the trunk 26'10" round can only be fully appreciated from below, within the grounds, where its massive bole divides about 2 metres from the ground into two trunk-size branches.

Then a vast canopy of branches reaches up and out in all directions, over the road and the wall. The bark is multi-coloured, with strips hanging off it, the long greyish leaves are spaced out, but this is typical of the species: the tree is full of new growth. It produces flowers and sets seed regularly, and new trees have been grown from the fertile seeds. The whole tree is redolent of the tangy fragrance typical of eucalyptus. Naturally resistant to drought, it has survived harsh Antrim winters, but the

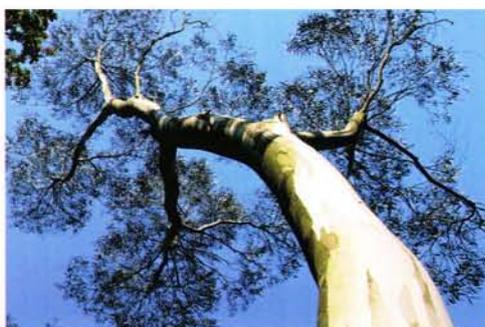
greatest threat came when it was suggested the tree was damaging the wall and road and should be felled.

Fortunately the school bursar appreciated its worth, stood up for it, and the tree was saved.

In its native Australia, an old tree like this might well have fallen victim to storms, lightning, and forest fires. Sheltered by its land of adoption, the tree has reached maturity and a size seldom seen anywhere.



The house and its introduced trees owe their existence to Lady Londonderry whose main home in Northern Ireland was Mount Stewart in Co. Down. She built Garron Tower as a holiday home, inspired by romantic castles of the Rhine in Germany. Choosing a surprisingly sheltered location, with good soil, the house was constructed and surrounded by landscaped gardens with specimen trees.



Eucalyptus at Castlewellan Arboretum

THE CROM YEWS



The yews at Crom are probably the oldest trees in Northern Ireland. Lord Erne claims they are 800 years old and he may well be correct. They are inseparable siblings, one brother, one sister, planted together so that now, from the outside, they appear to be one huge dark green mass. Within, branches sweep down and twist around, traces of training in the past now long abandoned. In the late 1840s the tree is described as having its horizontal spreading branches supported on wooden pillars with gravel walks between them. They spread over an area about 75' across and it was said that "A party of 200 have often dined under the tree". The trees are close to the ruins of the old Crom Castle which they pre-date by hundreds of years. One of the great

One of the great O'Neills of the sixteenth century is believed to have said farewell to his lady love under the already mature Crom Yews.

O'Neills of the sixteenth century is believed to have said farewell to his lady love under the already mature Crom Yews. It may have been Shane O'Neill later killed by the MacDonnells of Antrim, or more likely the great Hugh who battled against Queen Elizabeth 1 and eventually left the country in the 'flight of the earls' in 1603.

When Cecil Kilpatrick, ex.Chief forest officer, measured the trees in 1977, the eastern tree had a girth of 14' 11" and a height of 30', the western tree 13' 8" round and 37' tall. Since then they have been 'tidied' and have lost some of their mystery: it is now easy to get under and through their combined canopy. Although the grounds are now with the National Trust, the present house and immediate garden with its fine specimen trees are still the property of Lord Erne.



THE LARGEST LIME

There is no doubt that the mild temperature and plentiful rain of Fermanagh encourages tree growth. The broadest lime award was set to go to Crom Castle estate, but Florencecourt won by a *sizeable* margin. It is vast.

The Florencecourt lime is not far from the main entrance to the house and grounds, in the south-east of the estate. The lime stands in solitary splendour on high ground, a massive irregular trunk with low branches and 'buttresses' making it hard to measure, but it is at least 37 feet around, the largest girth of any tree featured in this book. This is probably an example of 'bundle planting', where on some estates several young saplings were planted together, eventually merging into one tree. Maybe these vast limes were created this way, but then again, maybe not.....

At Crom, there are several large limes, the biggest stands with one other near the gate from the field with the old castle ruins and yew trees, on to the lane down to the visitor centre and cottages.



The girth of the Florencecourt lime measures 37 feet



The lime at Crom in spring



The Florencecourt lime

THE DRUMIN OAK

This is the biggest oak in Northern Ireland, one of the largest in Ireland. It is a magnificent towering specimen, large in trunk (25'6") and branches; even its leaves are especially big.

At least two massive branches have already fallen, one the size of an oak tree in itself. Some timber was sawn but proved almost impossible to burn, it was so dense.

The branches have been lost in spite of attempts to secure the tree over 100 years ago, when great metal bolts were driven through trunk and branches to try to hold it all together: draconian measures which did not succeed.

The oak claims seventeenth century origins because it was said that King William tied his horse to it. Certainly he stayed at his host's castle, Killymoon, when it was already a sizeable tree.

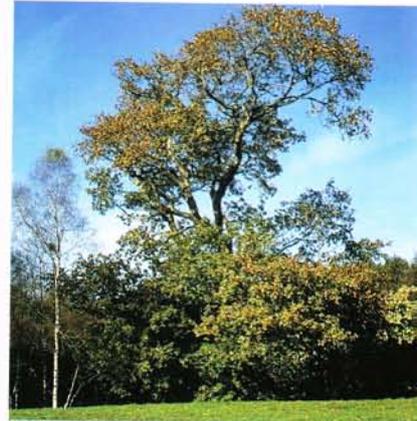
The tree is in rich soil and a sheltered

location, on a steep bank above the lovely Ballinderry River between Cookstown and Stewartstown: the river divides counties Tyrone and Londonderry in this area.

Across the vast walled field are two sweet chestnut trees, the most venerable 20' 11" around. Cattle nibble it, rub against it, trample around it so that roots are partly exposed. It has a hard time, but it is certainly not giving up.

The Drumin oak is named after the townland - Drumin, Cookstown. It is not accessible, growing within part of the walled demesne of Killymoon castle, and not visible from the road. The chestnuts overhang the 'red wall' by the 'red bridge' over the Ballinderry: this wall is another story altogether, built as famine relief work in the 1840's, part grey stone, part deep red local sandstone, it is a work of art.

(Right) The Spanish chestnut in the same field at Drumin



The leaves of the Drumin oak are particularly big (see postage stamp for size)

The oak claims seventeenth century origins because it was said that King William tied his horse to it.



The proud owner

MEASURING TREES

The measurements given in this book are only approximate. Girth, or circumference, is given in feet and inches (veteran pre-metric tape measure!) One foot is twelve inches and converts to 30 centimetres, three feet make a yard which is approximately one metre.

Girth should be measured at chest height, 5 feet or 1.3 metres. This is easier said than done with trees which are leaning, surrounded by undergrowth, with low side branches, or growing against a wall. A few inches up or down can make a considerable difference in the circumference measurement. The tape measure must be kept level.

Height may be estimated by triangulation - in an isosceles triangle with a right angle (90 degrees) the two sides are of equal length. A stick is held with outstretched arm at eye level to form this right angle. The length of the stick must be equal to the distance between the eye and outstretched fingers i.e. is specific to each person. The tree surveyor walks back until top and bottom of the stick coincide with tip and base of tree. The distance between that position and the tree then equals the height of the tree: this may be measured or paced out.

BIG TREES

Height and girth do not tell the whole story. The overall size of the tree and the effect it makes on the observer is also due to the shape of the crown and spread of the branches. Some of the largest oak and beech trees have massive canopies springing from trunks of relatively modest girth. The greatest trunks may belong to over-mature trees with reduced foliage.

A rough guide is that trees over 10' in girth are substantial specimens for smaller trees - holly, rowan, birch, cherry, even Scots Pine. Alder, willows, poplars may exceed 12'. Over 15' and the tree may be considered big for most broad-leaved species - beech, horse chestnut, lime, sycamore, oak and sweet chestnut. Long-lived specimens often reach 18'.

Once over 20' the tree is exceptional; over 25' and it is a real giant - to be expected from exotic conifers like Wellingtonia but very rare for others.



Inchmarlo Preparatory School use seed from the Cranmore chestnut to grow new trees in pots



TREES AND SEEDS

Trees propagate naturally from seed. Almost every tree - female trees for those species which are single sex - will produce seed each year. The quantity of seed varies from year to year, and how much of it is fertile/viable: this is related to the weather at flowering times and success of pollination.

The exceptions are hybrid trees some of which are infertile and have to be propagated by cuttings, such as the hybrid *Cupressus* varieties common in gardens. Cuttings are also used for willows and some poplars.

Once seeds are produced by the tree, many, like acorns, hazel nuts, are eaten even before they fall and more go once

they reach the ground. Squirrels, mice, birds all rely on the seasonal feast. They also have a more positive role because they help to spread seeds, by eating indigestible hard seeds which are then evacuated in droppings, and also by burying seeds for storage - squirrels and jays are best at this.

Seeds often remain dormant over winter, and need a cold weather spell before they develop. They need warmth and moisture to germinate, light to grow further. Woodland glades and edges, so long as the grassy vegetation is not too thick, are good. A fallen tree creates space, light, and disturbed ground which is ideal for new young seedlings to grow and so eventually take its place.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Help was received from many individuals and Government departments and their advisory bodies.

Every owner of every tree deserves thanks, not only for providing access to the specimens and information about them, but for looking after them in the first place. So many trees have been lost - more would have gone but for the protection offered by such concerned owners and guardians.

Previous tree records were sourced from TROBI (Tree Register of the British Isles).

Most of the photographs were taken by Mike Hartwell of Environment and Heritage Service, who dedicated much of his spare time in the inclement summer of 1998 to capture the true spirit of our trees. Others are from Dinah Browne, Ian Jackson of Ballynahinch and Ben Simon of Forest of Belfast; the line drawings of the Wesley trees are by Niall Timmins.



Beech tree, Crom, Co Fermanagh



This book celebrates a selection of Northern Ireland's special trees. We all know that our country has fewer trees than any other part of the European Union. Therefore it is even more imperative that as well as planting new trees we conserve our existing tree heritage. The first step however is to recognise what we still have throughout our rural and urban landscapes. We have tried to highlight some of the best examples there are - landmark trees, veteran trees, champion trees and people's trees, to name but a few.

But thousands more exist - and we would like to hear from you about them. We want this publication to be a catalyst for action. Please tell us about the special trees you know of that are not included in this book. You can phone our Millennium Tree Campaign Advice line

0845 6030472

E-mail us at cvni@btcv.org.uk

Write to us at

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or post a message on our Website
www.btcv.org.uk/cvni

Let's all work together to appreciate, and care for, these wonders of our natural heritage that are all around us.

John McClean
Chair, Trees of Time & Place
Steering Group.

