

A R D N A G A S H E L

"A Hidden Treasure".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The growth of trees is affected by circumstances of climate and soil, which vary according to the district, an important factor governing the success of many species is the occurrence of frost, especially in late spring and early summer. Proximity to the sea lessens the liability to frost and for this reason tender species and species which start growth early are most successful in maritime zones".

These are the words of H.M. Fitzpatrick which certainly bear proof when one looks at Ardnagashel. It is a pity therefore that Mr. Fitzpatrick, one of Ireland's foremost tree experts did not include Ardnagashel in his work of 1933, as this would have given us a comprehensive list of trees in the grounds and also on the tree size of the more important species.

However, there are other interesting references to Ardnagashel which I include in a later section of this project. Firstly, though, there are a few small points of importance if one is to understand later references in the project.

SECTION 1

LOCATION:- Ardnagashel lies on the North Eastern shore of Bantry Bay in West Cork. It is roughly half way between Glengarriff - to the North West - and Bantry - to the South East. It thus faces the North Eastern tip of Whiddy Island, as can be seen from the Ordnance Survey of West Cork supplied (Sheet No. 24).

SITE:- Ardnagashel House itself is about a half mile in from the main Glengarriff/Bantry road (T65). It is sheltered from the main south-westerly winds by Hill 203, which is south-west of the house and also by the extensive plantings of Fir and Beech along the shore on the eastern side. As seen from Sheet No. 24, there is a steep decline into the property as the area in general is very mountainous. The house today is of modern design and west of it there is a stream which flows into the sea and also a part of the same stream was diverted, due to a waterfall which interfered with the sleep of members of the Hutchins family. It now flows right around the planted area, entering the sea on the seaward side of the middle-west walk.

Here it may be interesting to say that Ardnagashel is plural - suggesting buildings on a high point of land - and refers to olden times when the place was an Estate and the house was then very big and servants and other people worked in the grounds and lived in nearby buildings.

SOIL:- From a broad point of view, the South-West of the country was glaciated from a North North-West direction. According to the West Cork Survey from Johnstown Castle, the ice moved across the Beara Peninsula and filled Bantry Bay depression, leaving a drift mantle of varying thickness in its wake. Thus it is possible that the soils present are of glacial deposit and the hilly areas mentioned in reference to the gardens later could in fact be drumlins.

The soil of the area is mainly a mixture of Complex B - found in low-lying valleys between drumlins, where poor drainage is the dominant factor affecting soil formation and soil conditions. Thus deep peaty soil where the water table

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is high. Also the soil has intense grey colours indicating gleying and silty shales. Also some Complex A series - sticky heavy brown earths - are in the area, but these, over the years with drainage and cultivation, may be changed to suit the plant requirements. It is evident, though, that Rhododendrons do very well in the area, indicating acid conditions.

CLIMATE:- Firstly, rainfall is very high, lying on average around 1,500 mm per annum, mostly falling from September to March. Observations for a 30 year average supplied by the Meteorological Service are as follows;

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
170	116	104	93	99	79	97	108	133	146	154	180

and this comes to 1479mm for the year. A place on the East coast, Dublin Airport, a similar 30 year average gives 763mm, thus we have double the rainfall in the area in question.

The South-West area has an average annual temperature of 51°F, being about 2°F higher than Dublin and the coastal region, Ardnagashel included, is always 1°F higher than the rest of the South-West region. An average of 10 days are frost days (32°F) on the coast, compared to Tullamore with 50 frost days in the year.

Also it may be noted that the isotherms run parallel to the coast with high values near the South-West coast and as one goes inland these decrease significantly, showing the influence of the Gulf Stream in the South-West area.

The duration of bright sunshine is comparable with the Midlands on an annual basis but there is more variation. However, as a whole, it is best compared to Wexford, the area of greatest sunshine in the country. On the other hand, the South-West region is very windy, which explains the shelter in the garden. Wind

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velocity ranges from 65-80 miles per hour, but higher readings have been recorded. It varies a lot due to the local topography. Relative humidity is also high, being 5-10% higher than in the Midlands, ranging from 75%-80% monthly.

With shelter from virtually all directions, with Hill 203, coastal plantings and woodland, we have extra advantages for growing plants within the area. Thus the mild warm weather of the area is enhanced. With high rainfall, bright sunshine and high relative humidity and frost free days from early March to near the end of December, then we have ideal conditions for growth. Thus most of the trees and shrubs are very big compared to Dublin, and also tender plants are growing outdoors, compared to glasshouse conditions on the East coast.

SECTION 11

Ardnagashel - its History and Ownership

Next I think it is necessary to take a look at the history of Ardnagashel which goes away back. This helps later to appreciate the actual place itself, and its plants. Thus, to understand its history and ownership down through the years, one must go back in Irish history to the time of the O'Sullivan clans, who owned the South-West region, or what is now called West Cork.

In their possession it was subject to a system of inheritance called *Gavail Ciain* or succession from father to son. Primogeniture was also encouraged by the English administrators to elect the Chief. This caused family dissension in many cases, as many were not willing to accept the system.

Donal Cam O'Sullivan claimed succession from his father but was opposed by his Uncle, Owen O'Sullivan. Feeling he was not getting justice he fought at the Battle of Kinsale with O'Neill and other Irish Chiefs. He later defended Dunbuoy Castle on the southern shore of the Beara Peninsula and after defeat he retreated to Leitrim with a thousand followers and later went to Spain.

There is an interesting account of this period by Peter Sommerville Large - "From Bantry Bay to Leitrim" based on *Pacata Hibernica* by Stafford and accounts of an O'Sullivan descendant writing in Spain later.

After the Elizabethan wars the area settled down under Owen O'Sullivan who had taken the Queen's side, but during the rebellion of 1642, either he or his successor fell into disgrace and his lands were escheated. Then after the Cromwellian conflict the Bantry area was divided between three adventurers who had enlisted with a promise of payment by land and this later created a very complex system of land tenure under sub-tenants.

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Now the family of Hutchins from Dorset appear to have been in Ireland from early in the 17th Century according to 'Burke's Landed Gentry' from which all references to the family were taken, the edition being that of 1958.

Richard Hutchins served under the Earl of Orrery in 1666 and became one of the Commissioners of Poll Tax. He owned property at Blackrock, near Bantry and his issue was of Castletown and Ballylickey, during the 18th Century.

Arthur Hutchins (1770-1838) bought Ardnagashel freehold for £1,000 in 1800. It then comprised of 300 acres. It was purchased from a descendant of one of the adventurers and he proceeded to lay out the Estate into plantations and pasture land, as is shown by the Ordnance Survey of 1842.. He probably built the ornamental arch which marks the entrance to the property from the main Bantry/Glengarriff road and he also constructed the avenue to the sea-shore and extended the fishermans cottage which was already built there into a beautiful mansion dwelling with moullin windows which was not altered again until 1880.

An interesting aspect is the stone drainage which is found everywhere and made for the collection of humus and prevented much of the erosion which is evident in so many other parts of the Bantry region. One of the problems was the protection of plants from cattle, both his own and those of other people. Enormous walls were built in places, both to clear and protect the land. Interesting local tradition was that in exposed areas west of the house the young trees failed until others were planted to give shelter; these were mostly firs. A few of these are still there protecting the valley in which many rare trees and shrubs have been growing since Arthur Hutchins time.

Either Arthur or his brother Emmanuel are mentioned in Wolfe Tone's journal during the attempted French invasion in 1796 as "a Dublin friend".

Emmanuel Hutchins (1769-1839) practised Law and died mysteriously in Damascus while purchasing Arab Horses which his groom brought back to Ireland.

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Ellen Hutchins (1785-1815), a sister of Arthur and Emmanuel, was a famous botanist to whom I refer to later in a special part of this project. The interest in botany was later carried on by other members of the family and many specimens of trees and plants in the planted area of the gardens come from Kew. There is a Cedar of Lebanon which might have been brought back by one of the family from the Middle-East.

Samuel Hutchins (1834-1915) was in Australia during the gold rush and returned to Ireland in 1858 with over a hundred seeds of Australian plants. No plant books or records were kept but it would be interesting to visit the property "Fortlands" near Charleville which belonged to his father and where there are a number of trees and shrubs which have survived and may have links with those planted at Ardnagashel.

Samuel Hutchins was a younger son and succeeded his brother Emmanuel Hutchins (1823-1880) who was buried in the 'Chillin' or family graveyard on the Estate. This is another interesting feature of the property and some of the burial stones can still be seen with dates and names fairly clearly marked. It is situated behind the specimen tree 27. on the tree survey plan and on the same side of the stream.

Eventually Samuel Newburgh Hutchins was succeeded by Captain Richard Newburgh Hutchins (1876-1915) and he was followed by his son, also Richard Newburgh Hutchins born 1915 and who is still alive. He passed the property over in 1940 to his sister Patricia Hutchins, a writer, who still resides there on part of the Estate.

Part of the property was then sold in 1947 to Colonel and Mrs. Kaulback who changed the place into a hotel and renovated the grounds and did extensive plantings. The building was destroyed in a fire accident in 1958 and was later rebuilt as a private dwelling. The extensive botanic collection of the Hutchins family for over a hundred years was extended by the Kaulbacks and many rare and tender specimens added.

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That part of the property formerly owned by the Kaulbacks was later sold in the early seventies to a Dutch Company. They had planned a new entrance, several summer houses, swimming pools and other modern structures which, if constructed, would have destroyed for ever the planted area west of the house where many fine specimens still exist. However, their plans were terminated due to objections by interested parties in the area. This Company still owns the property, with it's rarity and beauty and thus, sadly, the future of Ardnagashel is in their hands.

Around 1950 - during Kaulback Ownership.

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