

Deerparks of Clare

Hugh W.L. Weir

Over a hundred Irish townlands are called Deerpark. In Clare alone, we have ten of them while we also have a Deer Island. This latter figure reflects that there were at least six parks where deer were raised and hunted including Deer Island off the coast of the Fergus estuary near Ballynacally. Certainly at the close of the Middle Ages, all over England and Ireland there were hundreds of these hunting parks which were set aside by the Crown or the Lord of the Manor primarily for this purpose. In many cases, especially in the east of the country, deer parks — like the contemporaneously increasing Anglo Norman territory surrounding Dublin — were surrounded by a pale or stockade of pointed wooden palings often surmounting an earthen ditch. Indeed these were supposedly deerproof. Some of the posts which were usually oaken took root and one can occasionally tell the park bounds by the lines of such trees where they have survived.

It seems that, because of their Scandanavian background, the Normans were particularly fond of venison. But they also liked hunting. Cattle and sheep, which were herded by more nomadically inclined people, were no game as the horse or hound could well outpace them. Besides they were already domesticated. But the deer was different. It could escape and therefore gave a good run for money. But like so many sportsmen, the chivalrous Normans liked to have their sport handy and their quarry ensured. When they arrived in Ireland in the twelfth century they had already had experience of Saxon raids on their livestock in Britain. Possibly there they could barter a few cattle or sheep in return for other favours. Now they knew that when hunting the deer they were not going to be themselves the targets of an unwilling subject population. Therefore every manor had its deer park. In Ireland, the deer park became an established necessity for each lordly household and was probably the first physical feature created after the motte and bailey. Although the Normans introduced the fallow deer, the main animal to be reared and hunted in these areas was probably the red deer which was to be found in most of the forests of northern Europe. It is still to be found in Kerry. The park animal was a larger purpose-developed creature which was imported from mainland Europe. The object of the hunter was to get not only the heaviest beast but the one with the finest antlers. The number of points on the heavy beams counted. A stag was known as royal if it had twelve points. There were usually only about ten. If there were eighteen they were highly prized. Because of this association with lordship and chivalry, stags became prominent features on the arms of the nobility and gentry. Pride of place went to the lion. But only slightly less significant as a crest or on the shield was the stag, stag's head or antlers or those of bucks, harts, hinds or does. This was especially the case in German, English and Irish heraldry. They also occasionally appear on ecclesiastical seals such as that for the Abbey of Holyrood House in Scotland. There it was adopted in commemoration of a legend concerning the foundation of that religious house. "King David I, according to Bellenden's narration, coming to visit the Castle of Edinburgh on the Festival of the

Elevation of the Holy Cross, when the country all around was 'one great forest, full of hartes, hyndes, toddis and siclic manner of beistes', joined, contrary to the admonition of his confessor, a hunting party of his nobles, and had a miraculous escape from an enraged stag by the intervention in some shape of the Cross, and as an atonement for his having profaned this holy day and in thankfulness for his deliverance, he founded the Abbey of Holyrood House."¹ Amongst the families with County Clare connections to adopt symbols related to the deer on their shield were the O'Kinneallys, MacCarthys, O'Connells, O'Connors of Corcumruadh, O'Cullinans, MacCurtins and MacGraths. The O'Davorans had a hind as their crest whereas the O'Dineens adopted the stag's head to surmount their helmet.

As the influence of the Normans increased in Ireland, and as many of them became Hibernicised, it was natural that traditions were exchanged and experiences adopted by the native population. Naturally, therefore, in Clare the great O'Briens and Macnamaras saw what the Normans had created at Bunratty and adopted deer parks in much the same way as some people today like to keep up with their neighbours. The Earl of Thomond was particularly clever. He had the whole 462 acre Deer Island, which is about three kilometres long and one kilometre at its widest, converted into a deer park. Whether he actually hunted there is questionable, although in 1687 the seventh Earl wrote to Sir Donough O'Brien endorsing his letter with abstracts of depositions dealing with a Mr. Spaight's unauthorised keeping of horses, cattle and sheep there to the detriment of the Earl's own stock.²

So there were likely to have been horses on Deer Island. However, in 1709, Ambrose Upton wrote to Sir Donough enclosing a warrant to the keeper of the island to deliver a fat buck to him, the same Sir Donough, on Lord Thomond's 21st birthday — "and I don't doubt that you'll drink his and his Lady's health with the bearer thereof".³ This sounds as though the Island animals were comparatively easy to catch. Perhaps there was an enclosed deer park there for eleven years previously naval forces under Captain Thomas Coale were accused of taking fifty oxen valued at £250 which Sir Donough O'Brien had removed there for safe keeping. It is interesting to note that he makes no mention of deer.

Another large deer park was at Bunratty, where at least an enclosed 181 acres was situated a short distance to the north. Indeed, the seventeenth century Cardinal Rinuccini in a letter to his brother comments on the 3,000 head of deer there. They would certainly have needed more than the acreage of the present townlands. Clonroad's park was probably that situated in Doora parish a few miles east of Ennis. It probably consisted of 178 acres. The present 165 acre townland of the name in Noughaval parish, about a kilometre northwest of the castle, no doubt served the O'Briens of Lemeneagh. A very interesting situation occurs at Ennistymon. Three townlands, totaling 138 acres, known as Upper, Middle and Lower Deer park make a crescent on the east side of the town while to the west is the 184 acre Deer park West. Perhaps the O'Briens who lived in the castle

on the site of the present Falls Hotel liked variety, or perhaps the O'Connors of Liscannor and Dough came inland to the latter for their hunting. Just north of Craggaunowen is another large townland with a minute one to the east. The two make a total of 138 acres. Did this belong to Knappogue, Kilkishen or Craggaunowen itself? I would assume that the Macnamaras of the former castle used this for their sport. Dromoland too, had its deerpark over the brow of the hill to the south west of the castle. This once high walled enclosure is now reduced to a nominated acreage of 27 acres according to the Ordnance Survey.

Apart from the townlands and other areas known as

"Deerpark", there are those known as Castlepark, such as Castlepark just outside Limerick, at Liscannor and at Kilmihil. Possibly these were used for the same purpose. No doubt, in some cases quite small enclosures were created for breeding and farming deer rather than for hunting. They were in use up to the early eighteenth century in most castles and tower houses.

REFERENCES:

- 1 A Treatise of Heraldry Vol. I - John Woodward & George Burnett -Johnston 1892.
- 2 Inchiquin MSS.
- 3 Inchiquin MSS.

Correspondence

Referring to your excellent Vol. 9, I would like to make the following comments on two matters mentioned.

Siege of Ballyalla, p.55.

I believe that the Donal O'Brien of 'Leimaneigh' was a younger brother of Conor O'Brien of Leamaneh, who at the time was living there with his wife, Maire Rua. Frost lists him as Donough of Ballytumulta, a property in the parish of Kilkfenora. Teige Roe O'Brien could not possibly have been a brother of Murrrough, 6th Baron Inchiquin as his two brothers were named Henry and Christopher. He must have been either Teige of Ballykett, 4th son of Sir Daniel O'Brien of Carrigaholt or Teige of Caherminane, another brother of Conor of Leamaneh; both of these are listed by Frost as being present.

The difference in date of the final surrender of Ballyalla between Frost and White can be explained when it is remembered that the Catholic Irish had accepted the reformed Gregorian calendar whereas the Protestant English persisted with the old Julian calendar until 1752. It was insufficiently accurate and there had arrived a difference of 9 and later 10 days between the two reckonings. I am sure that Frost was using the English and White, an ardent Catholic, the reformed version. Thus it will be found that the Battle of Kinsale took place by English dating on Christmas Eve 1601, whereas the Spanish and Irish on the other side calculated the date as 2 January 1602.

Turning to Brian O'Dalaigh's article on the *Freedom Bases of Ennis, p.12*, I feel certain that the second grantee was Conor O'Brien of Dromore but he was not Sir Donough O'Brien of Dromoland's nephew, the Connor Fitz Teige mentioned in IM 1494 but Sir Donough's cousin german (sic) mentioned just above in the same will, Connor Fitz Terlogh. Fitz Teige was a person of no consequence and of whom little is known but Fitz Terlogh had (surprisingly for the Dromore family) been brought up as a Protestant, and was in 1699 both heir presumptive to the earldom of Thomond and also an equerry to Prince George of Denmark, husband of the heir to the throne of the future Queen Anne. All his expectations however were soon to terminate as he was drowned off the Isle of Man, 24 January 1700 (1701 New Style dating).

Whilst writing may I correct the unfortunate printing error that crept into my note about Ballinalacken Castle (p.42 "Correspondence") by the omission of the word 'not'. What

I wrote under (e) was: "The lands taken from Donald and restored by James II to Brian were those of Caruduff and *not* Ballinalacken or Dough."

Ivar O'Brien.

MURDER AT CLONDEGAD

In Flan Enright's article in Volume nine on the Clondegad Murder the site of the church is in Lanna not in Tubbernidane as mentioned (Page 39)

THE BOROUGH FAMILY IN QUERRIN

In connection with the Borough article in 'The Other Clare' magazine, I take this opportunity to point out that I've traced the Borough family back to 1528 and not 1825 as stated in the article

Sally Wright

BALLYALLA

My grandparents, Robert Vere O'Brien and Florence Mary Arnold Forster were married in July 1883 and went to live in Oldchurch - Roberts' house in Limerick. Their three eldest children Aubrey, Hugh and Jane (my mother) were born while their parents were still at Oldchurch. In 1890 Robert and Florence Vere O'Brien moved to Newhall, Ennis, which they rented for eight years from Mr. MacDonnell. Their youngest daughter, Florence Margaret (Flora) was born (in London) in 1896. In 1898 The Vere O'Briens moved to Ballyalla House which at that time belonged to Miss Stacpoole but was mortgaged to the Church body. My grandfather - Robert Vere O'Brien, died in 1913 and his widow Florence continued to live in Ballyalla until her death in 1937. By then her eldest son Aubrey had died in a shooting accident, her second son Hugh had married Margaret O'Brien and gone to live at Monare, Foynes, Co. Limerick. Jane had married Godfrey Nelson Hardy and was living at Walterstown, Crusheen and her youngest daughter Florence Margaret was running the farm at Ballyalla. Florence Margaret (Flora), continued to live at Ballyalla until 1950 when she sold it to Colonel Wordsworth and went to live in a small house at Carrownacloghy - near Crusheen. She remained there until her death in 1971. My parents, Godfrey & Jane Hardy, my uncle Aubrey and my aunt Flora are all buried in Templemaley churchyard at the back of Ballyalla and their dates can be seen on the headstone.

Veronica Rowe.