

An overview of the history of Glenveagh Castle Gardens

By Seán Ó Gaoithín, revised Sept 2020

Introduction

A concise history of the development of the Garden at Glenveagh Castle is presented here. There have been three significant periods of development of the Garden, the first - during the ownership of Mrs Adair from 1885-1921, the second - that of Henry McIlhenny from 1937- 1983 and the third - most recently under State ownership from 1983 to the present.

Ownership of the Glenveagh estate has passed through six private owners - John George Adair 1857-85, his wife Cornelia (Mrs Adair) was widowed from 1885 and sole owner of the Glenveagh Estate until 1921. The estate was held in trust for Mrs Adair's son Montgomery Ritchie from her previous marriage, until Glenveagh was sold to Arthur Kingsley Porter in 1929. In July 1933 A.K. Porter went missing presumed drowned off Inishbofin in North Donegal. His widow Lucy (Mrs Porter) maintained Glenveagh until 1937 when she sold the Estate to Henry P McIlhenny of Philadelphia. McIlhenny set about conserving and enhancing the Castle interior and renovating the gardens from 1947. McIlhenny donated the Castle and Gardens to the Irish Nation in 1983, having sold the lands of the Park to the Irish Government for the purpose of establishing a National Park in 1975. The Park which includes the Castle and Gardens are managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The three significant periods of development in the Gardens are outlined below.

Origins of the Glenveagh Estate

The Glenveagh Estate was first conceived by John George Adair who, from 1857, began buying up separate tracts of land and uniting them. The Estate includes all of the water-shed lands that are associated with the Owenveagh River and other tributary rivers that feed into Lough Veagh and most of the highest peaks of the Derryveagh mountains. These are granite formations overlaid with blanket bog. The vegetation is that of heather clad moorland, suited to grazing by sheep or deer and represents the poorest of soil types in Ireland. In the shelter of the valley a thin granite based soil has formed in the shelter of 100 hectares of natural woodland of oak, birch, hazel, and holly.

Red deer as a native species were extinct in Donegal by the late 19th century - however John George Adair planned to develop the natural potential of Glenveagh as a Deer Forest. Adair was a man of ambition, Glenveagh was but one of his projects, his main business interests being in the United States of America where he was promoting his brokerage business. There he met his future wife Cornelia Wadsworth Ritchie in 1867 at a social occasion in New York City and they married later that year in Paris. Around the same time the first period of construction of Glenveagh Castle occurred from 1868-72 resulting in the completion of a five story 'tower house' with stepped battlements and an adjoining two story wing. The original conception being that of a spacious hunting lodge, where the newly married couple could entertain guests with wilderness sports such as fishing and deer stalking.

In August and September 1902 - a distinguished group of visitors came to visit Mrs Adair at Glenveagh. They included Lord Kitchener, who proudly shot a great stag and members of the British royal family – HRH The Duke of Connaught (Queen Victoria's son) and HRH Princess Margaret together with Lord and Lady Hamilton of Barons Court. The great attraction of Glenveagh was the hunting. The Royal party returned in 1903, perhaps marking a social highpoint for Glenveagh Castle.

One of Adair's more significant business ventures was the development of the JA Ranch in Texas, which grew to almost 500,000 acres and was stocked with over 100,000 cattle. It was on one of his return visits to the JA Ranch in 1885 that John George died unexpectedly. The widowed Mrs Adair found herself the sole owner of large estates in Ireland, England and the USA. She continued to oversee the management and development of these estates for the following 36 years.

Phase I - The Victorian Garden made for Mrs Adair at Glenveagh

The Garden developed against a background of estate improvement typical in Ireland from the mid. 19th century. Around 1868 the lands around the Castle had been levelled in preparation for the Castle construction. By 1885 the land nearest to the Castle was reclaimed by drainage and the import of large quantities of top soil from a neighbouring demesne at Rockhill. Shelter plantations of Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* and the Corsican Pine *Pinus nigra spp. maritima* were established by 1890, to protect the gardens from the strong and frequent winds and to create a long-term supply of high quality timber for the estate.

The cultural imprint left by Mrs Adair at Glenveagh is most significant, between 1885-8 the Castle was extended, doubling its size and its capacity to accommodate guests. In 1891 Mrs Adair ordered the erection of a 1.8m-tall deer fence that extends for 45km. The estate was stocked with red deer from Britain and elsewhere in Ireland which included a gift of a stag from King Edward VII in 1891. The extensive woodland planting was beginning to thrive, notably the Scots Pine in the upper and lower parts of the Glenveagh valley and throughout the gardens.

The first evidence for the genesis garden comes from photographs in Mrs Adair's visitor book - one image from 1888 shows the land to the northeast of the Castle newly fenced with a 1.8m deer fence – thus enclosing what is now known as the Pleasure Grounds. The deer fence around the Garden encloses 11 hectares thus defining the extent of the Gardens. Local oral tradition relates that the spoil from the clearance of the castle site was used to level and reclaim a bog that is now known as the pleasure ground lawn. It was indeed a courageous and ambitious decision for Mrs Adair to take - to have extensive gardens laid out in such a remote and infertile environment at the centre of a deer park. By 1902 the OS survey map shows the extended Castle, planted gardens enclosed by the fence, containing the Pleasure Grounds, Kitchen Garden and Gardeners House.

In his own account of Glenveagh published in the book '*In an Irish Garden*' Henry McIlhenny noted that the gardens were originally laid out by a "Kew trained gardener". His name was John Rainy and he came from Belfast c.1890. There appears to be an image of him in the *Visitors Book 1873-1919* showing an elderly bearded man standing beside an enormous lily in bloom, from the year 1917. He is wearing

the unique tweed chosen by Mrs Adair to be worn by her Glenveagh staff. It is worthwhile noting this early indication of the success of lilies at Glenveagh, as later in the 1960's Henry McIlhenny imported large amounts of lilies from the Oregon Bulb Farm, USA, with *Lilium auratum* varieties proving very well suited to Glenveagh, growing to 2-3m tall.

A number of photographs of the garden in the early 20th century show a very well maintained kitchen garden and Pleasure Ground. A black and white photograph from 1902 of the Pleasure Grounds shows a lady dressed in white assisted by two men laying out the hoops and markers for Croquet on the lawn. Another from 1908 shows hedges of sweet pea and lavender are lined out in the kitchen garden plots and the glasshouse range and cold-frames are in view, indicating there would have been plenty of produce coming from the kitchen garden at that time of year to supply the dinning room table.

In the Pleasure Grounds a one hectare lawn was made and surrounded by flower borders that were planted with summer (half-hardy) flowers in the typical Victorian fashion. A photograph from c.1910 of the borders shows *Cortaderia*, *Sasa*, *Phormium*, *Cordyline*, *Trachycarpus* and a wealth of herbaceous flowers in cultivation. Other woody plants that continue to thrive in the garden planted around this time are sycamore, *Griselinia*, *Crinodendron* and two *Rhododendron* species *arboretum* and *falconeri*.

There area number of hard landscape features that date to c.1900. Near the entrance to the Pleasure Ground a spring fed stream feeds a pair of oval shaped ponds that are edged with granite boulders. A 'rock garden' features midway through the Pleasure Ground on rising ground and three viewing points are found on the extremities of the garden. These consist of stone steps and winding paths leading to a vantage point where a bench is placed – locations known to the older Glenveagh gardeners as "Mrs Adair's Seats". These original hard landscape features remain intact and give character to today's garden. Garden parties and charitable openings of the Castle Gardens were given by Mrs Adair during this time.

During the first World War, Mrs Adair made the Castle available to the British War Office, and it was used to accommodate a group of wounded Belgian soldiers. They arrived in late 1914 and left in late 1915. During their stay they helped the head gardener John Rainey to construct a link path joining the kitchen garden to the lower Pleasure Grounds crossing a wooded rocky slope. This path is known as the Belgian Walk in their memory.

Throughout the First World War, Mrs Adair continued to make the perilous journey across the Atlantic usually planning to be at Glenveagh for the warmest months of the year from July to September. The visitor's book records her long stay to entertain guests every summer from 1914 to 1919. At one stage all of the Glenveagh staff were engaged with collecting "sphagnum moss which grows in all the bog ditches" to be used in wound dressings on the war front. Mrs Adair's letters to her Ranch manager in Texas give accounts of the Rebellion in Dublin in 1916 and a raid by "the Irish rebels....on Glenveagh Castle looking for arms....injured four oil paintings of some value...and broke one looking glass which I hope will bring ill luck to them". Mrs Adair made her last visit to her beloved Glenveagh in 1919. One photograph in the

Visitors Book shows an elderly lady enjoying playing with a small dog. On September 22, 1921 she passed away at her home in London at the age of 84.

After a short period of uncertainty in the 1920's (1921-28) the Gardens at Glenveagh Castle enjoyed a revival from 1929 under the new owners Arthur Kingsley and Lucy Porter. The Porters set about renovating the Castle and Gardens. Staff were hired including a new head gardener Robert Neely (from Gartan, Co. Donegal) who came to live in the gardener's cottage at the top of the Kitchen Garden. The Porters (both with fine art backgrounds) had a strong aesthetic sense and they set about restoring the Castle interiors and revitalising the gardens.

Around 1930 Mrs Porter gave dahlia seed to Matt to raise new flowers for the garden. From this seed Matt raised a single flowered red dahlia that has been grown at Glenveagh ever since. According to May Armour (Matt's sister), Mrs Porter enjoyed using clay flower pots filled with mounds of moss as decorations in the Castle. Two moss-like plants that have naturalised in the garden are *Soleirolia soleirolii* and *Selaginella kraussiana*. The Porter contribution of the single red dahlia was significant as it has proved to be unique to Glenveagh. After the disappearance of her husband in July 1933 Mrs Porter did open the Gardens for viewing in aid of charity and in 1937 gave a festive pageant inviting all the community from the locality. However, she returned to Boston to live, and kept Glenveagh going until she found a buyer in one of her husband's students at Harvard.

Henry McIlhenny's Garden

Henry McIlhenny purchased Glenveagh from Mrs Porter in 1937 having rented the Castle with his mother for a holiday in 1934. For McIlhenny it was a return to his ancestral roots. His grandfather was a Donegal man. The Castle Gardens had by now matured after 50 years of the growth. Shelter from Scot Pine plantations and imported soil replaced exposed and windswept heath-land. Henry found himself with a sheltered woodland environment with native oak giving summer shade and hardy Scots pine making a microclimate and lots of space waiting for some new planting.

The years of the WWII interrupted any developments at Glenveagh. A small staff kept the affairs of the estate going, this included the deer herd, the castle, the gardens and a working farm. In the Garden ponies grazed on the Pleasure Ground lawn, however the kitchen garden was kept ticking over. Prior to Mr McIlhenny's return in 1947 Matt Armour and Jim Gamble hand-dug the one hectare Pleasure Grounds lawn, raked and levelled it by hand and reseeded it in preparation for their master's return.

It is clear McIlhenny wanted to make a garden at Glenveagh and to his good fortune his Harvard classmate Lanning Roper was planning to make his career in ornamental horticulture. Roper went on to become an influential writer, advisor and garden maker. Roper made his first recorded visit to Glenveagh in 1947, his name appears as the first guest in the castle visitor's book and he returned in 1949, 1950 and 1951. At this time the garden staff were busy with clearing the rampant *Rhododendron ponticum* from around the Pleasure Grounds and in the woods along the Belgian Walk to make space for fresh planting

Lady Ann Leirim of Mulroy, Carrigart, Co Donegal was an early gardening friend and advisor to Henry. Much of the early planting of new varieties of *Rhododendron* and *Camellia* came from the Mulroy nursery. An invoice for plants delivered to Glenveagh from Mulroy in 1948, lists 33 varieties of rhododendron and azalea, many of which remain as the best specimens in the current garden. They include *Rhododendron sinogrande* and *Rh. Falconeri* transplanted as mature specimens 5m tall, *Rh. cinnabarinum*, *Rh. davidsonianum*, *Rh. maddenii*, *Rh. augustinii*, *Rh. Loderi*, *Rh. 'Pink Diamond'*, *Rh. ciliatum*, *Rh. fragrantissimum* and *Rh. 'Lady Alice Fitzwilliam'*. Other trees supplied to Glenveagh then included *Embothrium* and *Eucryphia*.

James Russell (also known as Jim) made his first working visit to Glenveagh in 1953. He returned every year until 1959 and while at Glenveagh he was a busy man. He was remembered by the older garden staff as a man focused on his work. He would spend his time placing out plants, with the gardeners following behind him with spades to put them in. Russell produced extensive landscape design planting schemes for Glenveagh. The Glenveagh Garden Archive has hand-coloured plan drawings made by Russell in 1953, showing the garden accurately surveyed. These drawings are used as a basis for extensive planting schemes dated to 1954, 1955 and 1957. They include concept plans and elevations for an Italianate garden to replace the walled garden in 1955 and ambitious plans for a series of terraces and an Italianate Cascade above the Walled Garden in the native oak wood. None of these plans were agreed to by Mr. McIlhenny however his extensive planting plans were executed. Russell returned to Glenveagh in 1965 to carry out planting and to revise the landscape planting plans.

The planting style used by Russell is a woodland gardening style sometimes referred to as 'Robinsonian' – in Russell's case he had a genius for using species of rhododendron, planted for their foliage effect and masses of herbaceous plants from the East, planted in large drifts for naturalistic effect. Much of the Pleasure Ground, Belgian Walk, View Garden, Woods Path and Swiss Walk was planted by Russell in the mid 1950's. In Russell's own words McIlhenny "was really the nurseryman's greatest friend" quoting him on a visit to Sunningdale "well I'll have 20, I'll have 100, I'll have 40". The Sunningdale Nursery was a regular supplier to Glenveagh from 1956-1970. It would appear that the vast majority of planting made in the McIlhenny era was carried out under Russell's direction. All of the woodland planting in the upper part of the garden covering several hectares was carried out at this time. The exact number of plants is unavailable however it must have been thousands of specimens. Azaleas both deciduous and evergreen were planted in large blocks and drifts forming an understory to Myrtus, Eucryphia and tree rhododendrons. The 1954 planting plan of the Pleasure Ground includes mass herbaceous planting of *Gunnera*, *Hosta*, *Iris*, *Rodgersia*, *Astrantia*, *Hemerocallis*, *Hedychium*, *Eryngium* and *Lysitichum*. Varieties of *Rhododendron* include *Rh. buraevii*, *Rh. ciliatum*, *Rh. johntoneanum*, *Rh. augustinii*, *Rh. racemosum*, *Rh. concatenans*, *Rh. yunnanense*, *Rh. 'Loderi'* and *Rh. 'Tally Ho'*. Other woody plants include *Senecio*, *Berberis*, *Guevana*, *Hypericum* 'Rowallane Hybrid', *Carpenteria*, *Cotinus*, *Pittosporum*, *Magnolia* and *Clethra*. Azalea varieties feature throughout the Garden such as *Rh. 'Atlanta'*, *Rh. 'Berry Rose'*, *Rh. 'Eddy'*, *Rh. 'Gumpo'*, *Rh. 'Indica'*, *Rh. 'J A Van Nappert'*, *Rh. 'Leo'*, *Rh. 'Mac Bulstrode Form'*, *Rh. x mucronatum*, *Rh. occidentale* 'Superba', *Rh. 'Palestrina'*, *Rh. 'Pippa'*, *Rh. 'Royal Lodge'* and *Rh. 'White Swan'*.

Russell contributed significantly to defining the spaces in the Garden with his landscape plans. A formal framework was established, for example, creating a single axis path linking Belgian Walk, Walled Garden and View Garden. In 1957 plans were drawn up for the first formal element in the Garden in the Italianate style. Now known as the Tuscan Garden it comprises a rectangular lawn, edged with clipped *Griselinia littoralis*, and furnished with six Carrara Marble busts, a pair of reclining Sphinx, stone benches and limestone statues of Bacchus and Cornucopia mounted on plinths. The layout of the Tuscan Garden and adjoining Swiss Walk are the combined design work of Jim Russell assisted by Walter Bruger – the Swiss based landscape architect.

The following year 1958, part of the lean-to glasshouse range was demolished in the Walled Garden to be replaced by a Gothic style Orangerie to the designs of the French architect Philippe Julian. The styles of ‘Gothic’ and ‘Italianate’ are key design elements that are to be preserved in the Garden.

Henry McIlhenny’s annual visits to the Chelsea Flower Show to source new plants for Glenveagh became a factor in the 1960’s. Significantly the gardens were extended into the native oak woodland above the walled garden – here a half acre of wooded slope was enclosed with a deer fence, with a rustic granite stepped path leading to a wooded ravine known as the ‘Mossy Valley’. Here Russell came up with ambitious plans to create three great terraces and an Italianate cascade. These plans were greatly modified and instead of a cascade a great flight of steps known as the ‘67 Steps’ leading to a viewing Belvedere were constructed. Significantly this extension of the Garden is outside the original fenced area of the Garden, it enters the oak woods above, although remaining very much part of the Garden experience.

Lanning Roper shared a lifelong friendship with Henry McIlhenny with whom he had a shared passion for gardening. In many ways Henry and Lanning co-created the Castle gardens as we see them today. In 1949-50 Roper became volunteer gardener at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Edinburgh. In 1951 he joined the staff of the Royal Horticultural Society developing a talent for writing articles for Country Life. By 1957 he published ‘Successful Town Gardening’, 1959 ‘The Gardens of the Royal Park at Windsor’ and in 1960 ‘Hardy Herbaceous Plants’. In 1962 he took on the mantle of Vita Sackville West as correspondent on gardening to the Sunday Times.

The Castle Gardens at Glenveagh have been cited as Lanning Roper’s masterpiece. In his career he is attributed with perpetuating the best traditions of English Gardening into the ‘unsympathetic air of the later 20th century’. His garden commissions were extensive, 150 gardens in the UK, 7 in the Republic of Ireland and 8 in the United States of America. Glenveagh was his longest lasting and most significant commission. From 1959 onward Roper was chief consultant on the Castle Gardens for McIlhenny. He was mostly concerned with the process of gardening, knowledge combined with experience and *Genius Loci* – assessing the genius of place. Over a 35-year period he made annual or twice yearly visits to Glenveagh in spring and autumn, preferring to be left to his work of refining the planting schemes throughout and not too much socialising. He worked ‘hands on’ in the garden, planting new arrivals and supervising trimming and pruning. His visits would be followed up with copious notes made on refinements to each part of the garden. Plants not doing well were removed, specimens moved into new positions and the addition of copious amounts of new material such as spring bulbs planted in drifts and lilies planted

throughout the Pleasure Ground borders in groups of seven. Typed reports were submitted to Henry on all developments in the Garden.

The design of Italian Terrace on the Belgian Walk furnished with classical statues and terracotta pots from the Impruneta pottery in Florence is attributed to Roper. So too is the planting of the View Garden with glossy foliage plants to reflect light. The 1960's saw the expansion of the Gardens, with the construction of a second Walled Garden that functioned as a nursery to bring on stocks of new plants for transplanting into the Garden proper. A heated outdoor swimming pool was constructed below the Castle on the lakeshore beside the boat house. A courtyard paved with marble to the south of the Castle known as the Flag Yard was constructed around the same time. Here figs thrive and the sunny borders are planted with Echiums. Among the many horticultural suppliers of plants, bulbs and seeds to Glenveagh the Hilliers Nurseries were constant suppliers of woody and herbaceous plants from 1965 to 1984 and similarly the Slieve Donard Nurseries from 1966-1974.

Ropers commission at Glenveagh Castle as Garden Advisor is listed by Jane Brown as a commission that spanned the years 1959 to 1982. Ropers knowledge of plants and extensive experience as a garden advisor suited McIlhenny's purpose. Mc Ilhenny preferred the decorative approach to planting - "for effect rather than to show off individual botanical specimens". Writing for Country Life, in May 1973, Roper describes the Castle Gardens of the time. His description gives an overview of the fully realised horticultural potential of the location. The centre piece being the Walled Garden or Jardin Potager. This functioned as a cutting garden for the Castle, armfuls of lilies, phlox, dahlia and many other flowers were sent into the Castle to adorn the rooms in 17 large vases that were changed at least twice a week. Roper knew the value of silvery foliage plants, he recommended using *Senecio greyii* throughout the Garden as a foil to set off the other plantings and found the subtle colouring achieved by planting it in large terracotta pots also very effective. In the Jardin Potager he employed the silvery rosettes of *Celmesia* and *Artemesia* to punctuate the border plantings.

The 1970's saw the Garden staff expanded to include Matt Armour as head gardener assisted by seven full time gardeners. It was at this time that Roper advised Mc Ilhenny "don't make your garden one inch bigger; just take care of what you've got!". Ropers understanding of what could be sustained was wise council that McIlhenny took on board.

The Glenveagh Aesthetic

The dominant aesthetic at Glenveagh is that of a 'rugged watery wilderness'. By total contrast to the wilderness of the landscape the Castle and Gardens are the epitome of 'culture, style and comfort'. The late 19th and most of the 20th centuries saw the reputation of Glenveagh elevated as a place where the arts are truly valued and the highest standards in craftsmanship and conservation management are expected as the standard.

Style and colour have a history of use at Glenveagh, dating from the estates development at a hunting estate in the mid-19th century. For example there is the

unique tweed plaid to be worn by staff - first introduced by Cornelia Adair – the colouring mixes black, white, grey and light blue threads. The colour scheme in the drawing room that dates to Mrs Adair's time has been conserved - using a buff pink on the woodwork and pale bottle green on the walls.

The colour scheme in the Castle library of pale blue woodwork and rustic orange curtains was introduced in the period of the Porter ownership 1929 to 1937. These colours mirror those of the landscape particularly in October and November when the grasses on the mountain turn to a warm russet orange complimented by the pale blue sky reflected in the lake.

The decorative shell work in the main entrance hall of the Castle was made for the Porters by the young apprentice gardener Matt Armour assisted by Jim Gamble. The shells are from edible shellfish, whelks and mussels, most likely from the Castle kitchen.

In the McIlhenny period of ownership from 1937 to 1983, style and colour schemes were further developed. Earlier colour schemes were conserved, and new elements added. For example, the main entrance door to the Castle, the hall door was painted a deep holly green.

The most characteristic colour utilized within the around the Castle and through the Garden and on all Parks historic buildings is Park Estate Green. This is an aquamarine shade of green said to have been chosen from the glaze used in the deer-stag dinner service in the dinning room of the Castle. The exterior woodwork on the Bridge House, Gardeners Cottage, Boat House, Fishing Hut, Hunting Lodge and Gate Lodges is painted this colour as are the gates, doors and benches in the Garden. From 1975 when the OPW began developing Glenveagh as a National Park the use of Park Estate Green was extended to the new woodwork on renovated buildings.

The Orangery woodwork is painted 'battleship grey' – yet another unique colour choice for Glenveagh. This colour matches the many lead ornaments throughout the Walled Garden. This is further complimented with wrought iron Victorian benches placed throughout the Garden.

Another element of style is found in the roofing of Gazebo structures in the Garden, on the old sawmill, sheds in Garden and at the Bridge House. These roofs are clad with scalloped wooden shingles made from scots pine grown here at Glenveagh.

The Castle Gardens as an Historic Flower Garden

From 1975 the Office of Public Works began the installation of a new infrastructure that would include all the necessary facilities for a visiting public. A new head quarters for the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the region was constructed and a Visitor Centre with accommodation for an auditorium and gallery space to interpret the history and natural features of the Park. Positioning these facilities 4km to the north of the Castle and Gardens has meant any impact on the tranquillity of the Gardens has been minimised. A sense of continuity was maintained at Glenveagh by the transfer of staff from the private estate, managed by Julian Burkett for McIlhenny

to the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1983. A new head gardener Mary Forrest was appointed and the important task of documenting the plant collection of the gardens was completed and published by her in the An Taisce publication *Trees and Shrubs Cultivated in Ireland*. An extensive renovation of the Castle was implemented by the OPW to make the Castle fit for the visiting public. Some minor alterations were carried out in the garden to make walkways suitable for large amounts of visitors. Most significantly the role of the Glenveagh Estate had changed dramatically from that of a private retreat to a public resource and the Garden has been redefined as a 'public garden'.

Native oak woodland is one of the rarest and most beautiful types of natural vegetation in Ireland. At Glenveagh it is now afforded the highest conservation priority for its long-term protection. Since the formation of the National Park at Glenveagh in 1975 an ambitious programme to clear the invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* from the Park has been under way. It had been planted extensively throughout the Park, especially along the access roads and paths as an ornamental shrub and as 'game cover' in the development phase of the estate for Mrs Adair. Glenveagh's cool climate and acid peaty soils provided perfect conditions for the spread and multiplication of *Rh. ponticum*. By 1975 *Rh. ponticum* had spread to completely dominate the understory of the native oak woodlands thus threatening the very existence of the woodlands and preventing their regeneration. The clearance of the *Rh. ponticum* has been by far the most significant conservation action at Glenveagh in recent times. The removal of *Rh. ponticum* within the garden has been included in this programme.

Where cultivated plants thrive and set seed the potential exists for their spread. At Glenveagh we recognise that this has to be carefully managed. Potentially invasive species have to be watched closely and their numbers controlled where possible. A number of other garden plants have exhibited potential for spread into the natural zone of the Park are being controlled, these include *Gunnera tinctoria*, *Alchemilla mollis*, *Hoheria populnea*, *Dicksonia antarctica* and *Cortaderia richardii*. In recent times *Acaena novae-zealandiae* has spread into the Park from neighbouring Dunlewy, carried in by sheep and hill walkers and assisting its spread.

The plant collection at Glenveagh Castle contains about 1700 taxa. There is a predominance of ericaceous species that suit the acid soil especially *Rhododendron* of which there are 241 varieties, there are also *Pieris*, *Gaultheria*, *Erica* and *Pinus*. In the Pleasure Ground there are well grown specimens of *Magnolia tripetala*, *M. salicifolia*, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, *Trachycarpus*, *Rhododendron falconeri*, *Rh. sinogrande*, *Rh. cinnabarinum*, *Rh. arboretum*, *Pseudopanax ferox*, *P. crassifolius*, *Eucryphia* 'Nymansay', *Dicksonia antarctica* and a representative collection of the genus *Nothofagus* – *N. antarctica*, *N. x alpina*, *N. cunnighamii*, *N. solanderi* var. *cliffortioides*, *N. obliqua*, *N. dombeyi* and *N. fusca*.

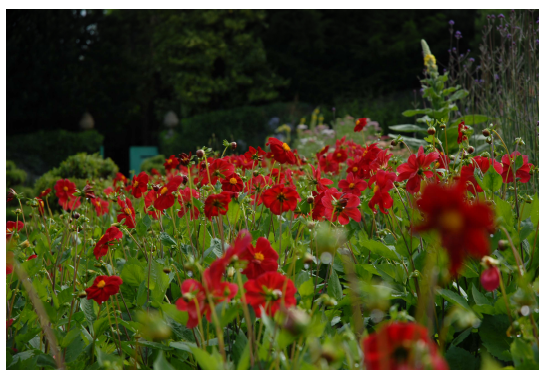
Unique to Glenveagh is *Rhododendron* 'Mulroy Vanguard', raised at Mulroy House in the garden of Lady Anne Leitrim around 1960, and planted at Glenveagh. It was described, named and registered with the RHS as a cultivar in 1985 by Mary Forrest. A further description and illustration were published in An Irish Florilegium II in 1988.

A survey of the planting records at Glenveagh from the 1950's to the 1980's shows that great quantities of woody and herbaceous plants were being acquired. This led in time to over planting and crowding in some parts of the Garden. The challenge now is to find a balance by selecting the more successfully growing flowering plants and at the same time replace short lived species and continue to build on strengths in the plant collection. In the McIlhenny era the timing of flowering in the garden focused on from May to September. Today the gardens are open all year round - therefore spring and late autumn flowering has become a greater requirement.

The Castle Gardens remain dynamic as new planting continues. The inclusion of native Irish species in the garden such as *Euonymus europaea* or *Euphorbia hyberna* is an example. In recent years a collection of Irish origin garden plants has also been built up. Within the Walled Garden there has been a shift in emphasis away from vegetable growing and instead toward the growing of herbs and Irish cultivars of heritage value. A collection of Irish apple varieties is established as standards and espalier trained in the upper part of the Walled Garden. A substantial collection of 19th century *Narcissus* varieties (collected in old gardens in Co. Donegal) now grow in the borders, as well as 60 varieties of *Galanthus* (several of Irish origin) planted in front of the Gardener's Cottage.

A characteristic mix of herbaceous plants occupy the surrounding borders of the Walled Garden, notably *Geranium* species, *Campanula*, *Euphorbia*, *Eupatorium*, *Aconitum*, *Phlox*, *Hemerocallis* and *Aster*. New borders of tulips, alliums, lilies, poppies and red-hot poker have been established and box hedging extended to give structure and year-round interest to all six of the garden plots.

The conservation of the Glenveagh raised *Dahlia* 'Matt Armour' is a major consideration for the garden staff. This unique clone was first raised from seed given to young under-gardener Matt Armour in 1930 by Lucy Porter. The variety has been in cultivation in the walled garden ever since. A stock of 100 plants is maintained, the tubers over-wintered in storage and planted out in the walled garden in May. The cultivar name *Dahlia* 'Matt Armour' was registered with the RHS in 1996 by Seán Ó Gaoithín (head gardener since 1995). The first published description of the cultivar appeared in *The Irish Garden* magazine in 1996. A botanical portrait by Wendy Walsh was commissioned by the OPW in 1996 and published in *A Lifetime of Painting*, a book celebrating her life work in 2007. In 2014 a major conservation initiative was carried out - raising 500 clones of *Dahlia* 'Matt Armour' that are virus free material by micro-propagation with the aid of the Department of Agriculture's Potato Research Station at Raphoe, Co. Donegal.



see image Gallery

In the autumn of 1996, the head gardener Sean O Gaoithin joined a seed collecting expedition to Yunnan, China led by the nurseryman Alan Clark of Muncaster Castle. The expedition was facilitated by the Kunming Botanic Institute. The share of the seed collected came to several hundred packets for propagation at Glenveagh. Those propagated and planted out in the Gardens included 60 species of rhododendron, several *Primula*, *Rosa*, *Cornus capitata*, *Sorbus*, *Malus*, *Anemone*, *Thalictrum*, *Hippophae*, *Meconopsis*, *Acer*, *Berberis*, *Iris*, *Camellia*, *Juniperus*, *Aralia*, and *Pinus* – thus adding to the interest of the Glenveagh Plant Collection. The same year Glenveagh received a delivery of rare and endangered trees, shrubs and herbs from the ICCP at Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. Some 45 species were planted throughout the gardens. Varieties that have grown well are *Eucryphia cordifolia*, *Cunninghamia konishii*, *Tepaulia stipularis*, *Podocarpus salignus*, *Buddleja globosa*, *Larix laricina*, *Sciadopitys verticillata* and *Picea smithiana*. These plants have been distributed to gardens for cultivation throughout Britain and Ireland for their long term conservation.

Most recently a statement of significance was prepared and presented for a one day conference hosted at the Castle in June 2009 on the subject of the Castle Gardens and their conservation. Four significances particular to Glenveagh were discussed and are summarised as follows: - **I** - The sublime landscape setting of the Castle and surrounding gardens in pristine environment, set the Garden apart. **II** - The garden structures and layout made for Mrs Adair in the late 19th century remain as the framework of the Garden. **III** - World class garden makers James Russell and Lanning Roper assist Henry McIlhenny to realise the horticultural potential of Glenveagh with significant architectural elements added to the garden such as the Tuscan Terrace, Gothic Orangery, 67 Steps and Italian Terrace. The decades of the 1950's and 1960's saw the transformation of the gardens with intensive planting of trees, shrubs and herbs, especially rhododendrons and southern hemisphere species. **IV** Henry McIlhenny hired the fulltime services of skilled craftsmen and women, demonstrating a commitment to the very highest in standards in craftsmanship.

The Garden records system has been updated from a card index system to a computer-based access spread sheet data base where all existing and new plant material is recorded. The records are updated regularly and published occasionally on the Glenveagh National Park website. www.glenveaghnationalpark.ie

Gardeners make gardens. In its hey-day, the Castle Gardens had eight full-time gardeners maintaining a private garden. Today there are four full-time gardeners struggling to maintain a garden open to the public all year round. The future conservation of the gardens will depend on sufficient staffing and resources being allocated to the Garden.

Conclusion

The Garden infrastructure created for Mrs Adair in combination with the native oak woodland and natural topography define the permanent form and structure of the garden. Over a 130-year period layers have been laid down shaping the personality of the garden. Arthur Kingsley and Lucy Porter in their short period at Glenveagh brought stability after an uncertain time in the 1920s. They reintroduced strong sense

of the aesthetic. Henry McIlhenny with his strong fine art background re-established a 'big house' culture at Glenveagh. McIlhenny had the continuous support of Lanning Roper (1947-82) in nurturing the Gardens at Glenveagh and influencing their year to year development. James Russell's major contributions took the form of copious planting in the 1950's and formal landscape plans introducing Italianate architectural forms and structures. By the 1960's a strong yet subtle sense of aesthetic was well established throughout the gardens. The Gothic and Romanesque styles expressed in the Castle architecture are mirrored in the Gardens. Although the primary concern for McIlhenny was planting for decorative effect a considerable plant collection has been amassed. The gardens now act as an amenity to up to two hundred thousand visitors a year. Many of the plants in cultivation are of high conservation value.

The Garden has drawn international attention to Glenveagh and ranks among the most significant of historic flower gardens in Ireland. It is a magnificent example of a benign relationship between human endeavour in the form of landscaping and the taming of nature and with natural biodiversity thriving as a consequence. Human creativity and biodiversity have prospered at Glenveagh Castle Gardens. Careful consideration is called for - to manage change in the Garden while insuring its sustainability. The management of the Garden calls for an intense conservation effort while at the same time providing for public access to the Garden and the story of its formation.

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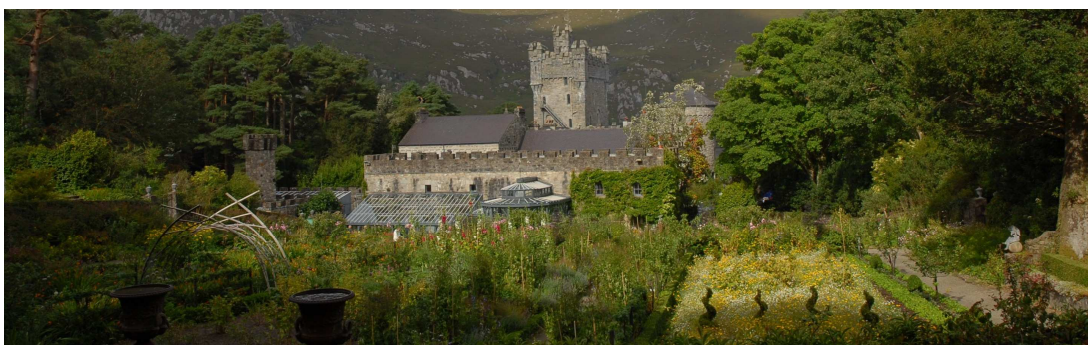
Gallery of Images



Henry McIlhenny



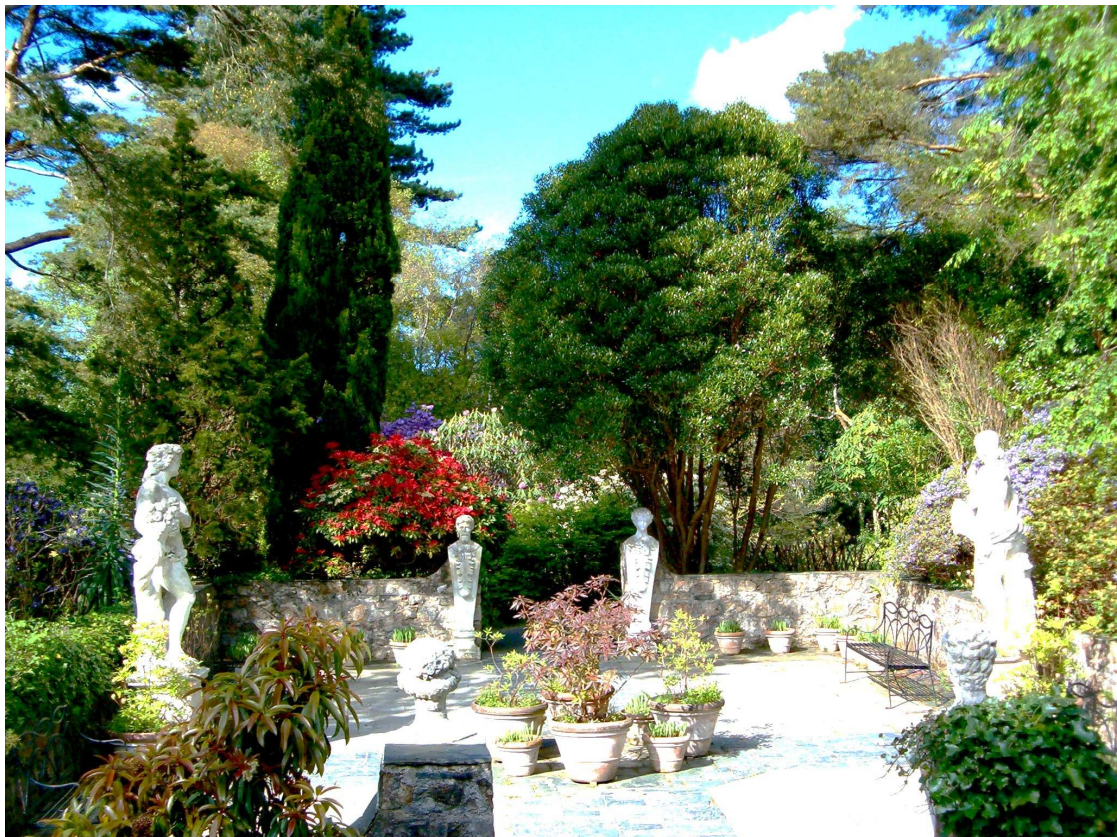
L-R Butler, H Bridgman, Capt A Campbell, Col. Leslie, HRH The Duke of Connaught, Mrs Adair (with dog) Capt Lascilly, Mrs Leslie, HRH Duchess of Connaught, Lord Hamilton, Capt. Pakenham, HRH Princess Margaret, Lady Hamilton







The Italian Terrace



The Italian Terrace



The Walled Garden



Dahlia 'Matt Armour'



Dahlia 'Matt Armour'