

What do you understand by landlord landscapes in ireland

[History](#)



Landlords were owners or lease holders of property who rented some or all their land to others. By 1703, most Irish landlords were of English or Scots origin, and had got their property during the plantations and land confiscations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most of them rented it out to Irishmen while themselves remaining residents of England¹. The subject of landlordism was a highly significant issue in the history of Ireland. This essay will examine the origin, distribution, scale and demise of Landlord Landscapes in Ireland.

All the counties of Ireland were owned and controlled by a minority, the landed gentry. When the county is broken down by barony and parish units we can get a more accurate picture of landscape variations in the mid-nineteenth century. These baronies were taken by force of arms and settled by successive invading societies, spawning adjacent dependent towns and villages². Examples of this are the North Salt barony in Kildare, controlled by Fitzgerald. The differences in barony sizes were immense, ranging from 8, 748 statute acres for Kilcullen to 48, 264 acres for Carbury.

The great estates and houses, such as Carton and Castletown, may create the impression that Kildare's landscape was dominated by such grandiose enterprises. Such a notion is erroneous not only in respect of Kildare but for Ireland as a whole where the moderately sized estate of 1, 000 to 5, 000 statute acres was the more common form of ownership. Of the 337 estates in the island of Ireland valued at £5, 000 and over in 1876, seven were located in County Kildare. The duke of Leinster's estate was the only Kildare property in Jones Hughes's list of the 33 in Ireland valued at £20, 000 and over³.

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The most visible aspect of the estates was their mansion house, ranging from great palaces like Castletown, Powerscourt and Castle Coole to substantial houses, perhaps little bigger than rectories, like Woodbrook in Roscommon, but forming centres of employment and social power. The houses of the gentry were not for the most part sited conspicuously on hills or precipitous cliffs. Indeed, Lord Palmerston at Classiebawn was one of the few Landlords whose front door could be seen from the public road⁴.

However, the paraphernalia of demesnes were strikingly visible. Examples are the demese walls stretching for miles at Carton and the gate lodges, which were better than many farmers' houses at Powerscourt. Other examples are the model villages, such as Adare, Caledon and in particular Coolattin, where the houses were only recently erected by the great lord of the land, Earl Fitzwilliam⁵. Another interesting point is the size of the landlord estates varies across the country. The east of the country contains the biggest estates, such as Powerscourt, while as one moves westwards they tend to get smaller.

The bigger houses of the gentry were considerable centres of employment and consumption, often resembling small villages. The Big House employed servants and estate workers, its needs gave work to the local artisans, and the landlord commonly owned the local grain mill. In County Fermanagh for example, Belle Isle, Cloebrooke and Castle Archdale were almost as substantial additions to the countryside as the villages of Lisbellaw, Brookeborough and Ballinamallard⁶. Lord Clonbrock spent £3, 500 annually on his house and surrounding estate.

Such establishments were like small factories. Twenty men and women were constantly employed on the demesne farm at Woodstock, Co Wicklow.

Although individual proprietors such as Lord Farnham in Co. Cavan or John Foster in Co. Louth were active advocates of farm improvement, very little of the landlords' wealth was reinvested in agriculture⁷. More money seems to have been spent on maintaining a social 'presence' or on status-enhancing projects such as the construction of large country houses and their associated parklands or laying out estate towns and villages. An example is Hugh L. Barton of Straffan House, owned 5, 044 acres valued at £5, 096 in 1876. He rebuilt Straffan House in 1832 and funded a new Church of Ireland in 1837⁸.

In the official returns of landlords made in 1872, there numbered around 6, 500 landlords in Ireland. The smallest estate entitling its owner to be considered a landlord was 500 acres. In fact, most of the country was covered by much larger estates, such as the Murray Stewart estate in Donegal. About 48 per cent of the country was divided into estates of 5, 000 acres and upward, which was owned by only 700 landlords⁹. According to a return made in 1872, 46 per cent of estates had resident landlords, while the remainder was owned by absentees, such as Viscount Harberton, who owned estates in Offaly East but supposedly never set foot upon his estate.

Although residence on estates was considered an important part of a landlord's duty, in practice residence was not of great importance to tenants. Indeed, some of the best-managed estates were owned by absentees, such as the duke of Devonshire's estates in Cork and Waterford¹⁰.

Two general patterns of distribution can be detected in respect of the purchasers of Kildare estates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Firstly, many of the properties listed in 1876 originated through investment by members of the higher clergy of the Church of Ireland. Secondly, capital earned elsewhere was metamorphosed into landed estates in County Kildare¹¹. The Alens survived through the conformity of Francis Alen in 1709. On his death, however, his Catholic relatives were unable by law to inherit and in 1752 the estate was sold to Robert Clayton, bishop of Clogher. Another example is the ancestor of the absentee Viscount Harberton, owner of 5, 168 acres in Kildare in 1876, who had come to Ireland as chaplain to lord lieutenant Essex in 1672¹².

The scale of landlord holdings is as follows. In the case of Kildare, one hundred and sixty three proprietors had estates of 500 acres and over in Kildare in 1876. Absenteeism was more common among the lesser owners, for many of whom their Kildare lands were tail ends of larger concerns elsewhere in Ireland. The marquis of Downshire owner of 1, 339 statute acres resided at Hillsborough Castle was one of Ireland's premier gentry¹³. Sir Capel Molyneaux's 2, 426 statute acres was only a small part of a greater property centred on his base at Castledillon, County Armagh. Others such as Conway R. Dobbs with 7, 971 statute acres in the barony of Carbury may have purchased marginal Kildare lands as a speculative venture. Others such as Viscount Harberton returned with 5, 168 acres in the baronies of Carbury and Offaly East and F. L. Fitzgerald, with 4, 382 acres in the barony of Clane, were stereotypical absentees¹⁴.

There were many reasons for the demise of the Irish landlord. The most obvious one was the Land War, a period of agrarian agitation in rural Ireland from the 1870's to 1890's. The Irish Land League was dedicated to bettering the position of tenant farmers and ultimately to a redistribution of land from landlords to tenants. The land Question was diffused by a series of Land Acts, allowing tenants to attain extensive property rights on their lease holdings and eventually to purchase the land off their landlords via government loans¹⁵. Other reasons for their demise were the bitterness of the war of independence, when many of their houses were burnt down, as well as the abolition of the lay magistracy with the creation of the Free State. As the new century began, the authority and control of the landlords was at last passed on to others.