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County Sligo's landed families: an introduction to their estates, big houses and demesnes

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Introduction

By the late nineteenth century the ownership of lands in county Sligo rested in the hands of a numerically small and elite group known collectively as 'landlords'. The longevity of the connection of these families as landlords varied and while the O'Hara's of Annaghmore were descendants of a Gaelic landowning family, others such as the Wynne, Gore-Booth, Ormsby and Perceval families belonged to the Cromwellian settlements of the seventeenth century.¹ Others, such as the Walkers of Rathcarrick, were successful merchants in Sligo town and estates in the later eighteenth century while the McMunns purchased Bellville at Dromore West as late as the 1860s. Enjoying the economic, social and political benefits that accompanied ownership of the most sought after commodity in Ireland, the landlord class exerted significant and enduring influence and hegemony over both Sligo's landscape and people. This essay will initially identify those who owned Sligo on the eve of a protracted process, beginning in the 1880s, that resulted in the dissolution of the estate system. The most symbolic inscriptions made by landlords on Sligo's landscape were the large country houses that functioned as family homes. Surrounded by carefully contrived demesnes, comprising home farms, ornamental gardens and woodlands amongst other features, the mapping of these 'big houses' and landscapes highlights their geography at the turn of the twentieth century. A significant number of these houses and demesnes remain today as significant components of the architectural and cultural heritage of Sligo's contemporary landscape.

Landownership, County Sligo 1876

An opportunity to recreate county Sligo's landownership structure in the later nineteenth century is afforded through the *Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards*, which records the name and address of each person who owned land and the extent in statute acres and annual valuation of these lands in 1876.² The



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Return of owners noted that Sligo comprised 447,479 acres, with an annual valuation of over £205,000. The county was then owned by 405 named individuals and several institutions and businesses including the Commissioners of Church Temporalities (868 acres), the Midland and Great Western Railway Company (331 acres), the Incorporated Society (138 acres) and the Corporation of Sligo (29 acres) amongst others. Landlordism as a system of landownership was prevalent in parts of rural Ireland well into the twentieth century until finally dismantled through the agency of the Irish Land Commission.³ The system, at its most basic, rested on an economic relationship between the landowner or landlord and the individual who rented or leased their land or property, be that a tenant or cottier. This relationship, in many instances fraught and contentious, provided the basis of the income of most Irish landlords.⁴

For the purpose of this essay a 'landlord' is defined as being in ownership of 500 acres and above. As table 1 shows in the case of Sligo, 149 (37 percent) of the 405 landowners listed in 1876 fell within this category in a pyramidal structure of landownership. The numerically insignificant nature of the landlord class and the extraordinary concentration of wealth conferred by land may be illustrated by the fact that, while accounting for just 0.13 percent of Sligo's 1871 population (115,311), they held over 86 percent (£177,942) of the total annual valuation of land in Sligo.

Table 1: Breakdown of landownership in county Sligo 1876, by size of holding in statute acres, number of owners and valuation (£) (compiled by J. Cherry from *Owners of Land (Ireland) ... 1876*).

Size of holding (statute acres)	Number of owners	Valuation (£)
1-500	256	26,823
501-1000	51	19,953
1001-2000	54	34,090
2001-5000	28	34,750
5001-10000	8	20,599
10001-20000	4	25,970
>20000	4	42,580

The smallest landlords owning between 501 and 1,000 statute acres in Sligo, numbered 51 in 1876. Some were resident, such as Jane Fenton, Castletown, Easky (790 acres, value £837) and Robert McMunn, Bellville, Dromore West (582 acres, value £289), while others, such as William H. Ormsby, Beechgrove, Hollymount, Mayo (967 acres, value £281), resided elsewhere in Ireland. At least six of those in the smallest landlord class were domiciled in England. A similar residential pattern, of landlords domiciled in Sligo, elsewhere in Ireland or

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abroad, primarily in England, emerges for the entire landlord class. While the lands held in Sligo accounted for the entire estates held by some landlords, for others these were but part of much larger holdings in Ireland and beyond. For example, the earl of Erne's 1,966 acres in Sligo, valued at £1,428, were a small part of a much larger portfolio extending to 40,365 acres in counties Mayo, Donegal and Fermanagh, where he resided and where most of his estate valued at £23,850 was located.⁵

While the extent of an estate may be used in constructing a profile of landownership in a particular county, using the total valuation of these lands - calculated on the basis of its quality, usage and location - provides a truer indication of the economic status and ability of a particular landlord to instigate landscape change and improvements.⁶ Despite the similar acreages enjoyed by Captain Richard Gethin (1,333 acres) and Myles G. O'Reilly (1,365), their estates were valued at £1,116 and £711, respectively. This may be accounted for by the fact that O'Reilly's estate was comprised of poorer quality more marginal lands in the parish of Kilturra, to the east of Tobercurry, when compared to Gethin's lands in the parish of Emlaghfad encompassing Ballymote and the parishes of St John's, Calry and Killaspugbrone that were close to or part of Sligo town. Again reflective of land quality and location, John Gethin's 2,530 acres centred on Ballindoon, on the shores of Lough Arrow were valued at £1,440 while the 2,441 acres belonging to James F. Guilfoyle, in the parish of Skreen which encompassed part of the Ox Mountains, held a valuation of £685. Several other Sligo estates, while of impressive extent, had notably low values including those belonging to Colonel Sir Robert Palmer, Kenure Park, Rush, Dublin (9,570 acres, value £1,229); Lord De Freyne, Frenchpark, Roscommon (4,052 acres, value £1,488); E. M. Caulfield of Hockley, Armagh (3,478 acres, value £554) and Grace Niddrie, Camcuill, Dromore West (2,172 acres, value £246). Therefore, rather than taking the acreage of estates, for the purposes of this essay, estates valued at over £2,500 in 1876 are used in identifying the 'premier' Sligo landlords in the late nineteenth century (table 2).

Sligo's 'premier' landlords: 1876-1883

Controlling over 43 percent (195,694 acres) of the entire county of Sligo, the fourteen landlords with estates valued at £2,500 or more per annum were not a homogenous group as an examination of table 2, augmented with additional detail on their entire landholdings from *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (1883), reveals. While the property portfolios of O'Hara of Annaghmore, Perceval of Temple House and Brinkley of Fortland were confined exclusively to County Sligo, each of the others held substantial properties outside of the county.⁷ With an annual valuation of £16,774, the most valuable Sligo estate belonged to the Gore Booth family of Lissadell. They also had property in Lancashire, with an annual valuation of £572. The largest estate covering over 34,000 acres belonged to the Cooper family, who also held 1,118 acres in

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Table 2: Names, addresses of owner, extent in statute acres and valuation of estates valued at £2,500 and >, county Sligo, 1876 (compiled by J. Cherry from *Owners of Land (Ireland)... 1876*).

Name of Owner	Domicile	Sligo (Statute Acreage)	Sligo Value (£)
Sir Robert Gore Booth Bart	Lissadell, Sligo	31,774	£16,774
Colonel E.H. Cooper	Markree Castle, Collooney	34,120	£11,548
Owen Wynne	Hazelwood, Sligo	12,982	£9,711
Charles W. O'Hara	Annaghmore, Collooney	21,070	£8,324
Wm R. Ormsby Gore	Derrycarne, Dromod	21,019	£5,933
Hon. W. F. Cowper-Temple	Broadlands, Hampshire	12,426	£5,801
Reps of Hon. L.H. King-Harman	Rockingham Castle, Boyle	12,629	£5,344
William Phibbs	Seafield, Sligo	10,507	£5,113
Alexander Perceval	Temple House, Ballymote	7,034	£4,198
Captain Abraham Martin	Cleveragh, Sligo	5,430	£3,456
John Wingfield Stratford	Maidstone, Co. Kent, England	6,555	£3,085
Richard G. Brinkley	Fortland, Dromore West	6,730	£3,006
Sir Charles Gore	Belleek Manor, Ballina	8,569	£2,788
Peter O'Connor	Cairnsfoot, Sligo	4,849	£2,565

Limerick. Cumulatively, its lands had an annual valuation of £12,735. The annual valuation of the Wynne's of Hazelwood Sligo estate, along with 15,436 acres valued at £4,380 held by them in neighbouring County Leitrim, amounted to £14,091. Besides their lands in Sligo, centred on Cleaveragh the Martin, later Wood-Martin, family also owned an additional 1,200 acres in Galway. While all of the landlords that we have encountered so far resided in the county, a number were domiciled in other parts of Ireland, including Sir Charles Knox Gore of Belleek Manor, Ballina, who, in addition to his Sligo lands, owned 22,023 acres in county Mayo which brought his entire estate valuation to £11,082 per annum by 1883. One of the wealthiest was Edward Robert King Harman of Rockingham, County Roscommon whose landed interests - inclusive of those in Sligo - covered 72,913 acres in counties Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath and Laois and was valued at £40,105 per annum. While King Harman's property interests were confined to Ireland, William Richard Ormsby Gore, with an address at Derrycarne, Dromod, County Leitrim - who succeeded his brother as the second Baron Harlech in 1876 and appears in Bateman as Lord Harlech - owned 58,358 acres, spread across several counties in Wales, Shropshire in England, and counties Sligo, Leitrim, Westmeath, Mayo and Roscommon, with a total annual valuation of £26,400.⁸

Several Sligo owners were absentee. The 12,500 acre Palmerston estate centred on Classiebawn, Mullaghmore belonged to William Frances Cowper-Temple of Broadland, Hampshire. By 1883 the estate had been inherited by his nephew Anthony Evelyn Melbourne Ashley. The other English- based Sligo landowner

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was John Wingfield Stratford. By 1883 his estate extending to 17,470 acres, valued at £11,338, across Kent, Sligo, Limerick, Clare, Mayo, Wicklow and Dublin, belonged to his son Edward John Wingfield Stratford of Addington Park, West Malling, Kent.⁹ While the majority of family names and owners listed in table 2 were long established in Sligo, Peter O'Connor of Cairnsfoot, owning a total of 5,151 acres in Sligo and Roscommon valued at £2,708 per annum, was a relatively recent member of this elite group.¹⁰ The Landed Estates database describes O'Connor as 'a successful merchant in Sligo' who 'acquired land in various parishes in the baronies of Tireragh and Tirerrill in the mid-19th century'.¹¹

None of Sligo's premier landlords held aristocratic titles, and only two, Gore Booth and Gore of Ballina, held hereditary baronetcies, entitling the bearer to use the title Sir. While predominantly members of the Church of Ireland, several of Sligo's late nineteenth century land and 'big house' owners were Roman Catholic including, amongst others, the Hales of Templeview, the Guilfoyles of Carrowcullen House, the MacDermots of Coolavin and Peter O'Connor.¹² Many Irish landlords, alongside the Anglican clergy, were looked to by many as quasi local leaders and spokespersons. As holders of various administrative and ceremonial offices such as justices of the peace (JP), Poor Law guardians, deputy-lieutenants (DL), lord lieutenants and high sheriffs, they played an integral role in maintaining British hegemony in Ireland. A few examples of holders of these posts in Sligo during the latter decades of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century include Edward Henry Cooper of Markree, lord lieutenant for Sligo between 1877 and 1902, George S. Keogh JP, DL of Geevagh, William Lougheed of Dromore appointed JP in 1875, Owen Phibbs JP, DL of Seafield, high sheriff in 1884, Anthony Thomas Guilfoyle JP, DL and high sheriff in 1897, a position filled by Henry McCarrick of Kilglass in 1902. Charles Kean O'Hara was Sligo's last lord lieutenant holding the office between 1902 and 1922.¹³

'Big houses' and demesnes

County Sligo's premier landlords, in particular those resident, enjoyed a privileged lifestyle centred on their family homes commonly referred to in Ireland as the 'big house'.¹⁴ Many of the ancestors of the late nineteenth century owners, in mimicking the landowning elites of eighteenth century Britain and Europe and in displaying their own socio-economic positions, taste and knowledge, had overseen the construction of large country houses sited in ornate demesne landscapes. These were the most symbolic landscape inscriptions made by the landlords expressing in built form their desire to embed and secure themselves in their ownership of lands in what was at times a hostile and tense country. As Roy Foster has observed, the landlords 'built in order to convince themselves not only that they had arrived, but that they would remain'.¹⁵

While premier resident landlords had the finances to make the grandest and most impressive inscriptions in Sligo's landscape, it is important that the agency of the landlords who owned less valuable estates in shaping the landscapes albeit

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Table 3: Name, owner and value of mansion houses and total area of associated untenanted land in statute acres, located by electoral division, county Sligo, 1906 (compiled by J. Cherry from *Return of Untenanted Lands*. *Coopershill was not included in this return but is included here).

House name	Owner	House Value (£)	Total area of untenanted land located by electoral division (statute acre)
Lissadell House	Sir Jocelyn Gore Booth Bart.	347	4,695 acres: Lissadell East, North & West (1,886), Rossinver West (1,640), Carney (675), Ballymote (346) and Bricklieve (148)
Hazelwood House	Owen Wynne	120	2,596 acres: Calry (2,022), Ballintogher East & West (547)
Temple House	Reps Alexander Perceval	110	1,397 acres: Temple (1,068) and Streamstown (329)
Markree Castle	Col. E.H. Cooper	90	4,594 acres: Collooney (3,001), Glendarragh (698), Carrowskeagh (493), Tobercurry (368), Riverstown (20) and Lisconny (14)
Classiebawn Castle	Hon. Evelyn Ashley	69	2,486 acres: Clifffony North & South (2,288) and Rossinver West (198)
Annaghmore	Major Charles K. O'Hara	68	3,926 acres: Coolaney (2,258), Annagh (1,144), Ballysadare West (515) and Carton (9)
Rathcarrick House	John F. Walker	63	705 acres: Knockaree
Hollybrook House	Agnes Ffolliott	55	759 acres: Aghanagh
Lisheen	Catherine Phibbs	55	165 acres: Kilmacowen
Cloonamahan House	Dr Henry Tweedy	50	361 acres: Lisconny
Doonally House	Roger K. Parke	44	359 acres: Drumcliff East
Chaffpool House	Reps Edward Armstrong	40	144 acres: Leitrim
Fortland	John L. Brinkley	39	2,411 acres: Buncrowey (1378) and Easky East (1,033)
Scurmore House	Reps S. L. Lewis	37	402 acres: Castleconnor West
Carrowgarry House	Alexander Crichton	37	279 acres: Dromard East
Kilglass House	Henry McCarrick	37	270 acres: Kilglass
Coolavin	The MacDermot	35	313 acres: Coolavin (230) and Carrownaskeagh (83)
Doonecoy	Robert G. Hillas	33	908 acres: Templeboy North & South
Templeview	James H. Hale	32	272 acres: Easky East
Carrowcullen House	Anthong Guilfoyle	31	24 acres: Skreen

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Table 3: Continued.

House name	Owner	House Value (£)	Total area of untenanted land located by electoral division (statute acre)
Longford House	Sir Malby Crofton Bart.	30	1,554 acres: Dromard West (1,454) and Aughris (100)
Castle Neynoe	M. F. B. Stack	30	200 acres: Ballynakill
Doobeg House	Charles Phibbs	30	476 acres: Kilturra
Cooga Lodge	John Howley	26	364 acres: Rathmacurkey
Tanrego House	Richard J. Verschoyle	25	409 acres: Dromard East
Geevagh Lodge	George Keogh	22	874 acres: Ballynahsee
Ballindoon House	Percy Gethin	22	248 acres: Killadoon
Heathfield	Thomas Randle Phibbs	22	354 acre: Carrickbanagher
Cloonbarry House	Henry McCarrick	22	228 acres: Kilmacteige
Woodhill House	Thaddeus Tiernan	20	94 acres: Buncrowey
Camphill House	Reps Grace Niddrie	20	362 acres: Buncrowey
Seafield House	James McMunn MD	18	74 acres: Easky East
Streedagh House	Richard W.J. Jones	18	272 acres: Lissadill North
Oghil House	Robert W. Armstrong	17	163 acres: Rathmacurkey
Dromore House	William Browne Lougheed	16	490 acres: Cartron (314) and Dromore (176)
Castledargan House	John Hosie	14	194 acres: Ballintogher West
Moneygold	Major Gerrard M Eccles	13	160: Cliffony South
Powellsborough House	James J. Powell	12	336 acres: Tobercurry
Castletown House	Thomas G. Fenton MD	11	126 acres: Easy West
Farranmacfarrell House	Alexander Cuffe	7	170 acres: Dromore
Coopershill*			

on a smaller, perhaps less impressive manner in the localities where they resided, is also examined and appreciated in this essay. In selecting 'big houses' and demesnes as the primary inscription of Sligo's landlords on the county's landscape, an opportunity to examine these in the late Victorian- early Edwardian period is afforded by a survey of untenanted lands published in 1906.¹⁶ This details the extent and valuation of all untenanted [demesne] land and locates what were referred to as 'mansion houses'. Table 3 summarises this data in respect of County Sligo. Interestingly, details relating to several of Sligo's country houses, including Coopershill, Riverstown and Cleaveragh, Sligo are not included.

Fig. 1 shows the distribution and value of Sligo's forty 'big houses', in the early twentieth century based on the *Return of Untenanted Lands*. The county's dramatic and scenic physical landscape and coastline were exploited to provide

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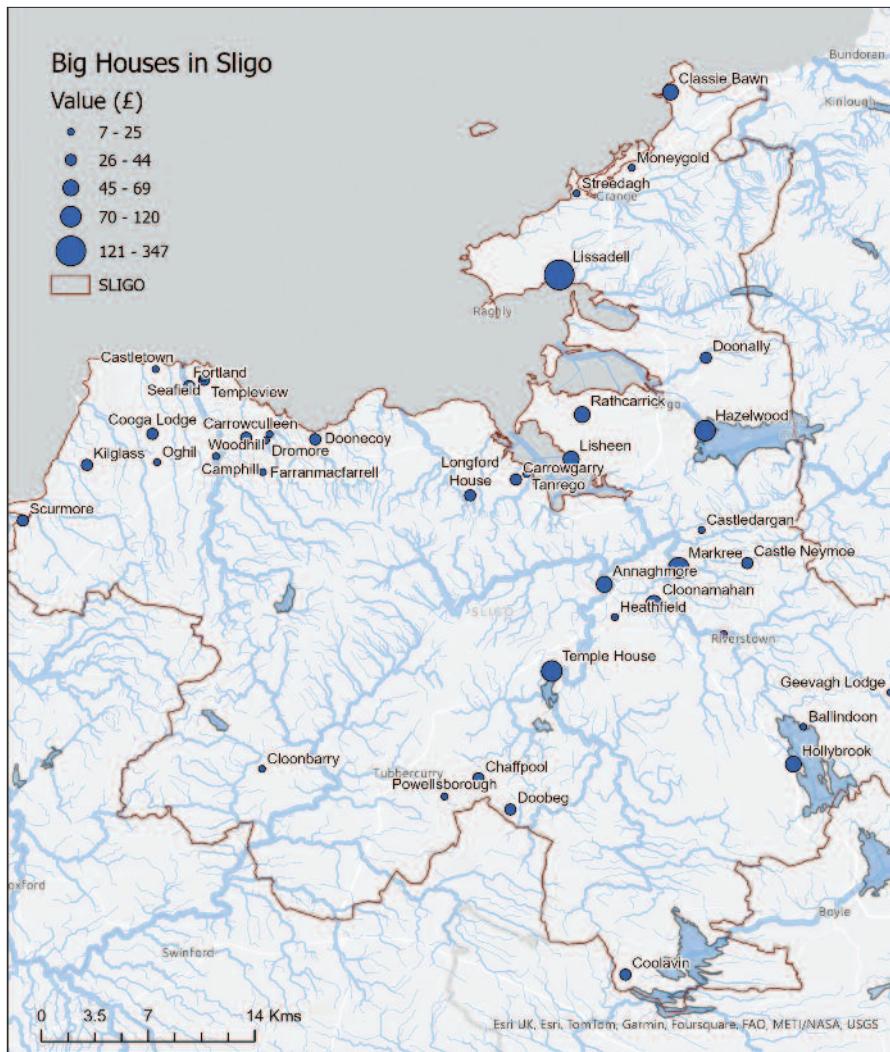


Fig. 1: Distribution and value of Sligo's big houses, circa 1906 (compiled by J. Cherry from *Return of Untenanted Lands*. Map by S. Hegarty).

the backdrop for many of the county's finest demesnes. The largest concentration was in Tireragh barony between the bays of Sligo and Killala, west of Sligo town. Seventeen of the county's big houses were located here mainly on the Atlantic lowlands in the north of the barony. Water of sea, lake and river was a primary attraction and many houses were found dotted along the coastline, on the shores of Lough Gill, Lough Arrow and Templehouse Lake and along the Owenmore River and Unshin River. As Arnold Horner has observed, the geography of 'Gentlemen's Seats' in the early nineteenth century as depicted on William Larkin's map of the county, 'reflects the priority given to scenery and soils over many decades'.¹⁷

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The county's stock of 'big houses' consisted of a range of architecturally important buildings of varying valuations (table 3). Some of these houses, such as Temple House, the property of the Perceval family, belonged to the early phase of landlordism whereas others, such as Coolavin House at Clogher, were recent additions. Houses from each of the great phases of country house construction and architectural design from the eighteenth century onwards are found in Sligo.¹⁸

By the early Edwardian period, Sligo's oldest 'big house' - and second most valuable in 1906 with an annual valuation of £106 - was the Wynne family home, Hazelwood House. Owen Wynne, a military man, who acquired the estate in 1722, commissioned Richard Castle to design a residence on a peninsula overlooking Lough Gill for his new home.¹⁹ Following Palladian architectural principles and completed by 1731, the house, comprising a central block of three storeys connected to two storey pavilions, was Castle's first project in Ireland and is 'recognised as one of the finest medium sized country houses in the country' (plate 1).²⁰ Other houses in Sligo designed around classical architectural ideals include Coopershill, designed by Francis Bindon and completed after a marathon nineteen year build in 1774, a date commemorated in cut stone above the main entrance door.²¹ By the mid- eighteenth century, the Ffolliott family at Ballinafad had replaced an older family home with a new five-bay, three-storey over basement residence named Hollybrook House.²² Longford House, the seat of the Crofton family, was completed by 1782, but destroyed by accidental fires in 1814, 1840 and 1916.²³ Besides these imposing mansions, a range of other middle-size country houses - many of which would be enlarged or remodelled during the nineteenth century - had also been constructed by landlords owning less valuable estates. Doonecoy, a two-storey, over basement, seven-bay house, close to Templeboy was constructed around 1760 at the core of the 7,444 acre Hillas estate, valued at £2,351 in 1876.²⁴ Rathcarrick House, in the shadow of Knocknarea and centre of the Walker family's 1,304 acre estate, valued at £780 in 1876, Castle Neynoe, near Ballysumaghan and Tanrego House, Beltra, all date to around 1790.²⁵

A number of Sligo's landlord houses were remodelled, enlarged or replaced by new residences over the course of the nineteenth century. These were inspired by emerging and fashionable architectural design ideals, including neo-Classical, neo-Gothic and Tudor Revival architecture. In employing these older architectural forms, many Irish landlords were attempting, as historical geographer Lindsay Proudfoot has shown in the case of the Gosford family at Armagh, to give the impression that their links with the lands they held were of much greater antiquity than was the case.²⁶ The existing eighteenth century Cooper house, Mercury Castle at Collooney, now known as Markree Castle, was enlarged and 'Gothicised' by Francis Johnston, the preeminent Irish country house architect, for Edward Joshua Cooper. Johnston's drawings for the twelve bay, three storey over basement house, dated between 1802 and 1803, held today

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Plate 1: Hazelwood House (from Lawrence Collection, courtesy National Library of Ireland).

in the Irish Architectural Archives, provide a unique insight into the internal layout and spaces of such houses.²⁷ This dramatic intervention at Markree was part of a notable phase of mansion house remodelling, enlargement and construction in Ireland, an unintended consequence of the Act of Union. Previously, landlords from the provinces had maintained Dublin homes in order to facilitate attendance at parliament and to be close to the capital's power nexus. However, most gave up their Dublin residences post 1801 and, retreated to their country seats.²⁸

In the 1820s, the O'Hara's commissioned William Farrell to design a new house at Nymphsfield, their ancestral seat.²⁹ This house was enlarged in 1871 by James Franklin Fuller and renamed Annaghmore (plate 2). One of the largest building projects undertaken was the construction of Lissadell House for Sir Robert Gore-Booth during the mid-1830s. Designed in a Greek Revival style by the English architect Francis Goodwin, the imposing residence was Sligo's highest valued country house in 1906 (plate 3).³⁰ The Phibbs family commissioned Sir John Benson, a native of Colloney, who adopted a classical design for its elegant residence at Lisheen, Strandhill. Smaller scale projects were also being undertaken and the older Armstrong family residence, dating from 1740, was reconfigured as out offices when their new two - storey, three - bay residence named Oghill House, near Kilglass was completed in the late 1830s.³¹ At the same time, the Jones family constructed Woodhill House, Dromore West, on a Tudor Revival style.

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As the country recovered after the Famine, rising rents afforded some landlords the opportunity of constructing new 'big houses'. In 1856, Captain Thomas Meredith constructed a new residence at Cloonamahon, near Collooney. Designed by Nathaniel Montgomery, the use of multi-coloured bricks, sourced in Chester, gave the house an elaborate neo-Tudor character (plate 4).³² James Rawson Carroll, the Dublin - based architect, redesigned the Walker family home at Rathcarrick in 1873, taking full advantage of its spectacular location beside Knocknarea.³³ Classiebawn, possibly the most striking of Sligo's landlord houses, sited on a bare headland overlooking the Atlantic Ocean at Mullaghmore, was also designed by Rawson Carroll. Originally planned by Lord Palmerston and completed by his step - son William Cowper Temple, the castellated structure in the Scottish neo -baronial style, built in Mountcharles sandstone by Patrick Morris of Sligo, was completed in 1875 at a cost of £2,850 (plate 5).³⁴ One of



Plate 2: Annaghmore House (courtesy of the author, 2024).



Plate 3: Lissadell House (photograph by Jimmy (James) Eccles, courtesy Local Studies, Sligo County Library).

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the last country houses constructed for a landowning family in Sligo was Coolavin House, Clogher (plate 6). Completed in 1898 for Hugh MacDermot, attorney - general of Ireland and The MacDermot, Prince of Coolavin, the three storey, five - bay house designed by James Franklin Fuller was sited just off the avenue that led to Clogher House the ancestral McDermot seat.³⁵



Plate 4: Cloonamahon House, circa 1970s (courtesy Irish Architectural Archive).



Plate 5: Classiebawn Castle (courtesy Local Studies, Sligo County Library).

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Plate 6: Coolavin House, circa 1970s (courtesy Irish Architectural Archive).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, a number of new owners purchased former landlord houses and their adjoining estates and demesnes. In 1854, James McMunn, a medical doctor, purchased part of the Irwin estate at Killeenduff, Easky, under the terms of the Encumbered Estates Act, and built Seafield House overlooking the Atlantic.³⁶ In 1875 Woodhill House, the Jones family home at Dromore West along with some 200 acres, was purchased by Thaddeus and Thomas Tiernan for £9,500. McTernan noted that the Tiernans, natives of Templeboy, had amassed a significant fortune in South America and the 'payment is said to have taken the form of two bags of gold coins'.³⁷

Most 'big houses' and the demesnes on which they were sited, were important centres of rural employment as evidenced by the census returns of the early twentieth century. The household staff at Lissadell in 1911, thirteen in number, included the butler Thomas Kilgallon - immortalised along with several other employees in a life - scale mural on one of the pilasters in the house's dining room, completed at the turn of the twentieth century by Count Markievicz - a cook who also acted as the housekeeper, a children's nurse, a children's maid, a lady's maid, three house maids, a scullery maid, a hall maid and two footmen. At Hazelwood House, an equally impressive staff complement including a nurse, two footmen, a cook, a kitchen maid, a scullery maid, three house maids, a laundress and two grooms maintained the 46 room mansion occupied by Muriel Wynne, her husband Philip Perceval and their daughter Dorothy. The other Sligo houses for which household census returns were made in 1911 show that they were serviced by household staff numbering between one at Farranmacfarrell and eight at Templehouse.³⁸

Demesnes of County Sligo

Each of these 'big houses' were sited on what was commonly known as demesnes, untenanted lands which landlords set aside for their own use.³⁹ Each demesne landscape was a site of conspicuous consumption, where significant finances were

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expended in displaying wealth, status, knowledge and appreciation of architectural fashions, landscape design, agriculture, botany and arboriculture. Traditionally, more valuable and larger estates were associated with larger demesnes and it appears that this correlation may also be applied to County Sligo. Table 3 details the statute acreage of untenanted lands held by owners of 'big houses' in Sligo in 1906. Apart from demesnes contiguous to residences, landlords also held other untenanted lands lying at a distance from their family home. These empty places were used for recreational purposes, such as shooting and hunting, industrial activity or as bog land, which landlords retained sole ownership of. Sir Jocelyn Gore Booth owned the largest area of untenanted land, amounting to 4,696 acres, spread across seven electoral divisions, in 1906. While most of this was located in the electoral divisions of Lissadell East, North and West, Rossinver West and Carney centred on Lissadell House, another 494 acres was found in Ballymote and Bricklieve, electoral divisions in the south of the county. The owners of eight of the forty-one mansion houses possessed demesnes of over 1,000 statute acres. The others ranged in size from the twenty-four-acre demesne attached to Lecarrow House to the 908 acres surrounding Doonecoy House belonging to the Hillas family.

In addition to providing the site for the 'big house', most demesnes contained a whole array of other buildings, structures and features, each with aesthetic, recreational and economic functions. As Elizabeth Bowen wrote:

Each of these family homes, with its stables and farm and gardens deep in trees at the end of a long avenues, is an island - and, like an island, a world. Sometimes for days together a family may not happen to leave its own demesne.⁴⁰



Plate 7: Dublin Road gate lodge, Markree, 1832 (courtesy Irish Architectural Archive).

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The separateness of the private space of the demesne landscape from the public tenanted estate was dramatically demarcated on the landscape by demesne walls such as those found at Markree Castle and Temple House. Gate lodges located at the entrances to the demesnes were primarily points of surveillance and control over those entering the private world of the gentry.⁴¹ At Cleaveragh, the demesne was entered via ornate twin gate lodges, while at Lissadell at least two gate lodges were evident on the 25 inch Ordnance Survey maps. Besides this practical function, gate lodges also added significant aesthetic appeal to the demesne landscape, frequently echoing in their architectural design, the 'big houses' they guarded. In Sligo this pattern is evident in the striking Gothic gate lodge (named Dublin Gate), designed by Francis Goodwin for Markree in the early 1830s (plate 7) and the Scottish baronial architecture seen in the lodge at Classiebawn Castle, constructed by 1880. At Markree nine gate lodges were identified on the demesne including Principal Lodge, Ballygrania Lodge, Dublin Gate, Toberscanavan Lodge, Beehive Lodge,⁴² Deer-park South Lodge, Deer-park North Lodge, Railway Lodge and Castletown Lodge.⁴³

An extraordinary range of features and structures may be identified from an examination of Ordnance Survey maps depicting demesnes including, a home farm, extensive woodland plantations, a body of water in the form of rivers or natural and man-made lakes, ponds or canals some of which were used in supplying fish, a walled garden producing an extraordinary range of both every day and more exotic vegetables, fruits and flowers, a nursery for plants and trees, an orchard, stable yard, agricultural buildings for cattle and storage of machinery, a sawmill and a dairy amongst others. Key demesne employees, such as the land steward who had overall responsibility, assisted by the head gardener, head gamekeeper and forester, were also often provided with purpose built accommodation on the demesne such as is found at Markree, for example. This was aimed at attracting and maintaining the best employees, many of whom came from outside of Ireland for these professional positions. Some of the other numerous farm labourers, gardeners, gamekeepers, grooms, stable yard workers, coachmen and saw millers were also provided with accommodation as well.

The extensive woodlands on demesne attached to Temple House are notable, and the following named areas King's Wood, North Approach Wood, Icehouse Wood, Gashouse Wood, Laundry Wood, Black Wood, Armstrong's Wood, Peter's Clump, Orchard Wood, Rabbit Burrow Wood, Oldferry Wood, Limekiln Wood, Crane's Clump, Kilbrittain Wood and Derreen Wood were recorded on the early twentieth century OS maps. The area of woodland in Sligo had been increased in the first half of the nineteenth century when 'in excess of over half a million trees were planted on thirty four estates throughout the county'.⁴⁴ Such areas of woodland epitomise the typical Irish demesnes and several other impressive examples include the woodland plantations at Markree Castle, Union Wood held by the Coopers close to Ballisodare and Hazelwood Demesne. Besides adding significantly to the overall appearance and beautification of the demesne landscape, woodlands were also financial investments and on several demesnes, including Hazelwood and Lissadell, sawmills, processed the timber.

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Plate 8: Markree Castle, early twentieth century (courtesy Irish Architectural Archive).

The integration of water features within the overall design of the demesne was a priority for many owners in following the naturalised landscape design ideals in fashion from the mid-eighteenth century. Hollybrook Demesne was located on the shore of Lough Arrow and Hazelwood Demesne was endowed with access to and views of both the Garavogue River and Lough Gill. The Owenmore River flowing through the demesne at Annaghmore was crossed by the main avenue by means of an ornate three span cut stone bridge. At Markree (plate 8) and Coopershill, the River Unshin was crossed via ornate stone bridges that, while practical, also contributed to the overall aesthetic appeal of these special landscapes.

Other practical structures and features found on most demesnes were cattle yards and stable blocks. Since the eighteenth century, many landlords pioneered agricultural improvement in terms of crops and husbandry. Well into the nineteenth century the breeding of pedigree cattle and other innovative agricultural practices were pioneered on the home farm. By the late eighteenth century, for example, a farm yard complex had been constructed at Markree and at Coopershill a cut stone coach house and stable yard had been added. In a country dependent on horses, for use on the farm, for transport and in certain instances for recreational uses such as hunting, stable blocks and yards were integral features on demesnes in Sligo throughout the nineteenth century. New stable blocks were built at Markree in 1830, at Lissadell in the 1840s, at Annaghmore in 1864 and at Templehouse Demesne in 1870.

Walled gardens and orchards were another integral productive component of most demesnes. At Coopershill, the walled garden dated from the eighteenth century. The walled garden at Rathcarrick extended to over one and half acres in

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the early twentieth century. At Lissadell, the walled garden covered over two acres. A contiguous nursery produced herbaceous and Alpine plants, forest trees and ornamental shrubs. These ancillary activities promoted by Sir Henry Gore Booth provided employment for some 200 people.⁴⁵ While primarily functional and productive demesne spaces, many also doubled up for recreational purposes. Home farms, woodlands and bodies of water were used for hunting, shooting, fishing and boating. Various walkways and avenues that could be traversed on foot or horse led to spots where the best vistas of the demesne and surrounding countryside could be enjoyed.

Summer houses or ornamental cottages have been identified on the second edition OS maps on several Sligo demesnes. At Doonecoy, a small demesne belonging to the Hillas family, two summer houses are marked alongside the river that flowed through the property, while Hazelwood boasted three summer houses and an ornamental grotto. Other recreational features included boat houses such as that at Tanrego West, on the shore of Ballysadare Bay; at Hazelwood leading to the private ferry that crossed the Garavogue River; at Ballindoon House on Lough Arrow and at Templehouse demesne, where a new boat house was constructed in 1870 on the neighbouring lake. A bathing house at Hollybrook demesne on the shores of Lough Arrow took the form of a small octagonal room with a fireplace. Photographic evidence of Lisheen shows a bowling green, croquet lawn and tennis court laid out for the enjoyment of the Phibbs family and their guests.⁴⁶

The relationship between most landlords and the Church of Ireland, the established state church until 1869, was manifested in the landscape by their provision of sites for and financial support toward the construction of churches. Frequently, these churches were located on or very close to demesnes and were used by landed families as both expressions of their faith and identity, as places of worship and family burying grounds. Although funded through the Board of First Fruits, many landed families augmented state funding thereby allowing for more ornate churches. Examples of these include Christ Church, Dromard, constructed in 1817 on the demesne at Tanrego House; Kilglass Church constructed in 1829 at the entrance to Kilglass House; Ballysumaghan Church, dating from around 1831 in close proximity to Castle Neynoe; while Aghanagh Church completed in 1850 was located on the edge of Hollybrook Demesne. One of the later and very elaborate expressions of this connection between landlord and church in Sligo is found at Lissadell. Here, the church and rectory, constructed in the 1860s, were augmented by the school built around 1890.⁴⁷

Some landlords were particularly anxious to record for posterity their role in making and shaping their demesnes. At Annaghmore, the initials CKOH are incorporated into the main entrance piers commemorating the agency of Charles William O'Hara, formerly Cooper of Coopershill. He had inherited Annaghmore from his unmarried uncle Major Charles Kean O'Hara in 1860, on the understanding that he would take by Royal Licence the surname O'Hara which he duly did.⁴⁸ The new stable block at Annaghmore completed in 1864

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also includes O’Hara’s initials and the family coat of arms. The Cowper Temple and Meredith family coats of arms, respectively, were incorporated above the main entrance doors to Classiebawn and Cloonamahon,

While not a particularly common phenomenon in Sligo, the naming of houses or townlands to commemorate family surnames was another conspicuous way by which landlords sought to inscribe their permanent presence in the landscape. The Cooper family, for example, lent their surname to two townlands in Sligo. At Riverstown, the townland of *Lios Uí Bhlátháin* ‘the ring-fort of Ó Breisleáin (a family name)’ had been renamed Cooperhill by 1780, while at Markree, the townland of Gobbadagh was renamed Cooperhill by 1749. By 1800 the townland of *Na Mullacha* close to Tobercurry was renamed Powellsborough by the Powells; the King family by 1735 had replaced *Eanach Uí Bheannacháin* on the northern shore of Lough Arrow with Kingsborough. On the eastern shore of the lake, the Ffolliot family changed the name of its lands in the mid-eighteenth century from Ballyhealy to Hollybrook Demesne.⁴⁹

The end days of landlordism in Co. Sligo

While the ‘big house’ in Ireland was attacked, looted and burned for a variety of reasons during the 1916-1923 revolutionary period, Sligo’s landed gentry and their houses remained largely untouched.⁵⁰ A number of factors appear to be responsible for this.⁵¹ The transfer of ownership of land from landlord to tenant, for example, was underway in Sligo from the 1880s onwards under the terms of the various Land Acts. While many landlords in the county resisted selling their estates, others such as Alexander Crichton (1861-1934), who succeeded to his family 2,800-acre estate in 1888,

quickly made it known that he favoured the abolition of dual ownership and put into operation a scheme whereby the tenants on his estate could purchase their holdings.⁵²

In the same year, Robert Hillas (1856-1937) succeeded to the ownership of a 7,400-acre estate. By the early 1900s he had successfully rebuilt cordial relations with his tenants which had been severed as a result of the action of his father whose refusal to reduce rents, resulted in evictions during the Land War and Plan of Campaign in the late 1870s and 1880s.⁵³

While Hillas had atoned for his father’s actions, Charles Phibbs of Doobeg House, who in 1916 had inherited a relatively small 742-acre estate, purchased by his father in 1877, continued his father’s hostile relationship with his tenants. McTernan noted:

Unfortunately for himself, and almost unique in the County, Charles Phibbs was the type of landlord whose defiant and uncompromising approach greatly embittered relations between himself and his tenants when times were difficult for both.

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Phibbs was forced to leave Ireland for Wales in 1922, after enduring several challenging years during which 200 acres of his best lands had been commandeered by Sinn Fein in 1918, his house vandalised, hay barn burnt and a grave was dug on his front lawn.⁵⁴ The only other Sligo landowning family who departed during the 1920s was the Ffolliott sisters, Margaret and Maria Hernietta, of Hollybrook House. They had sold off their tenanted estate but retained a substantial demesne which they operated successfully. In 1918, however, a crowd of two hundred local Sinn Feiners with bands marched onto the Ffolliott lands and occupied a 20-acre field already under tillage and proceeded to divide it 'in the name of the Irish Republic'. Though they attempted to resist this incursion, they soon abandoned their ancestral home in the for London.⁵⁵ Several other Sligo estates including that belonging to the Parke's of Dinally, acquired by the Congested Districts Board in 1912, were used to create new farm holdings and enlarge existing farms in making them economically viable, a process that removed the potential for agitation around landlords continuing in ownership of estates .

For the majority of Sligo landlords, strong connections with and interest in a range of local concerns and organisations did much to ease their transition into newly independent Ireland post 1922. In 1905, Alexander Crichton had, in a period when denominational divides were still the norm, provided a corrugated iron structure at Beltra for use as a non-denominational community hall. The Gore Booths, the McCarricks of Kilglass House, the Phibbs of Lisheen House and the Crichtons of Carrowgarry House, were all keen supporters and activists in the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society and the emerging co-operative movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁶ Several Sligo families were heavily involved in organising and hosting sporting activities and events in Sligo. The Wynnes hosted the Sligo Races at Hazelwood towards the end of the nineteenth century⁵⁷ and Major Charles Kean O'Hara, a noted horseman, maintained 'O'Hara's Harriers' at Annaghmore for various point to point meetings down to the 1940s.⁵⁸ Members of the landowning families were also involved in musical groups, including the Sligo Musical Society and Feis Ceoil, and were also major supporters of the Sligo branch of the British Legion (1919), established to support ex-servicemen and the later Sligo Women's branch of the British Legion (1939). It is also pertinent that Sligo's landed gentry such as Roger Chambers Walker and William Gregory Wood-Martin consciously promoted research on the county's unsurpassed archaeological heritage. Furthermore, a lasting identity based on landscape and people was given to Sligo by the writings and paintings of the Yeats family, who although merchants rather than landlords were connected to the latter class.⁵⁹

Of the forty-one mansion houses identified in 1906 - excluding Cooperhill which was not included in that return - the vast majority, as table 4 shows, are remarkably still extant, albeit with different functions and in varying structural conditions. A number of these houses and the demesne lands surrounding them remain - through a combination of good fortune, astute management and the

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Plate 9: Temple House (courtesy Temple House Estate).

presence of heirs - in the ownership of descendants of the owners listed in 1906, These include, amongst others, Annaghmore, Carrowgarry House, Coopershill House and Temple House (plate 9), where the owners operate a range of commercial ventures.⁶⁰ After lying in ruins since 1931 when it was stripped of its roof and fittings after the sale of the estate by the Land Commission, Castle Neynoe has been restored as a family home. Other houses have not been as fortunate and remain as ruins. These include Cooga Lodge, Farranmacfarrell House, Powellsborough House and Lisheen House, Strandhill. The latter property was acquired in 1945 by Messrs John Sisk Ltd who stripped the slates, timbers and fittings from the house and today only the ivy clad walls of the house remain.⁶¹ Hazelwood House, likewise faced demolition when offered for sale by the Land Commission in 1945.⁶² However, it has survived in many incarnations down to the present day, though its grand demesne has been dramatically altered by the construction of a factory complex in the 1980s. Hazelwood and adjoining lands were purchased by global drinks company, Sazerac in June 2022, and are currently being developed as a major tourism destination.⁶³

Other 'big houses' have taken on new functions such as Markree, which was operated as a hotel from 1992 by Charles and Mary Cooper who sold it in 2015. It remains as a hotel operated by the Corscadden family as one of four castles they market under the brand 'Romantic Castles of Ireland'.⁶⁴ Castledargan is now part of a larger hotel complex. Carrowcullen House, Skreen, was converted into a convent in 1921 by the Sisters of Mercy who remained there until 1995 when the Spiritual Life Institute, a community of hermits who renamed the property Holy Hill Hermitage acquired it and have maintained it since.⁶⁵ Cloonamahan

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Table 4: Current condition and use of Sligo's 'big houses' (compiled by J. Cherry from the NIAH available at www.buildingsofireland.ie and McTernan, *Houses of Sligo* and McTernan, *Sligo families*).

House name	Current condition and use
Annaghmore	Extant, private residence
Ballindoon House	Extant, derelict
Camphill House	Extant, private residence
Carrowculleen House	Extant, religious community
Carrowgarry House	Extant, private residence
Castle Neymoe	Extant, private residence
Castledargan House	Extant, part of larger hotel complex
Castletown House	Demolished, 1930s
Chaffpool House	Extant, derelict
Classie Bawn	Extant, private residence
Cloonamahan House	Demolished, 1976
Cloonbarry House	Demolished, mid - 1950s
Cooga Lodge	Extant, in ruins
Coolavin	Extant, unoccupied
Coopershill	Extant, private residence
Doobeg House	Extant, private residence
Doonally House	Extant, in ruins
Doonecoy	Extant, private residence
Dromore House	Extant, private residence
Farranmacfarrell House	Extant, in ruins
Fortland	Extant, partially demolished, in ruins
Geevagh Lodge	Extant, private residence
Hazelwood House	Extant, unoccupied
Heathfield	Extant, private residence
Hollybrook House	Extant, unoccupied
Kilglass House	Extant, private residence
Lissadell House	Extant, private residence
Lisheen	Extant, in ruins
Longford House	Extant, private residence
Markree Castle	Extant, hotel
Moneygold	Demolished, 1962
Oghil House	Extant, private residence
Powellsborough House	Extant, in ruins
Rathcarrick House	Extant, private residence
Scurmore House	Demolished, 1978-79
Seafield House	Extant, private residence
Streedagh House	Extant, private residence
Tanrego House	Extant, private residence
Temple House	Extant, private residence
Templeview	Extant, derelict
Woodhill House	Extant, private residence

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House, Collooney, served as a sanatorium until the 1940s, when it was purchased by a religious congregation, the Passionists Order, who demolished the house in 1976. Today, the site is owned by the Health Service Executive.⁶⁶ Four other houses have suffered a similar fate as Cloonamahan and have been demolished. These include Castletown, Easky, in the 1930s, Cloonbarry, Aclare, in the 1950s, Moneygold, Grange, in 1962 and Scurmore, Enniscrone, levelled between 1978 and 1979. The latter had operated as a hotel up to the 1950s, but when it ceased operating the roof and fittings were removed to avoid paying rates.⁶⁷

After a particularly troubled period in its management during the 1950s and 1960s Lissadell House, arguably Sligo's and possibly one of Ireland's best known 'big houses', immortalised in William Butler Yeats 1927 poem, 'In memory of Eva Gore Booth and Con Markievicz', was sold in 2003 by Sir Josslyn Gore-Booth to Constance Cassidy and Edward Walsh.⁶⁸ Since then they have undertaken significant restoration work on both the house and demesne, and while primarily their family home it is open to the public to visit at certain times during the year.⁶⁹ Other houses await new leases of life including Hollybrook House and Ballindoon House on the shores of Lough Arrow and Templeview, Easky, which, although included on the list of protected structures, has deteriorated significantly in recent times.⁷⁰ The majority of other houses remain as private residences including Camphill House, Camcuill, Oghill House, Culleens, and Woodhill House, Dromore West. Classiebawn, renovated by Edwina Ashley and her husband Lord Louis Mountbatten and used by the family until his high profile killing at Mullaghmore in 1979, is now owned by the Tunney estate.

Conclusion

Today, Sligo's 'big houses' and demesnes, where they survive, are important components of the county's cultural landscape. The construction and maintenance of these large and ornate country houses set amidst carefully planned and manicured demesne landscapes, was undertaken by the relatively small numbers of landowning elite, the landlords who resided in the county. Such conspicuous consumption was underpinned by the state protected system of landownership, which provided a revenue stream and gave them hegemony to inscribe their values and tastes in a dramatic way on Sligo's landscape. By the later nineteenth century, Sligo's landowning elite was beginning to show some diversity as a number of estates were sold to wealthy professionals and entrepreneurs, challenging our traditional view of the landlords as a hereditary caste.

The stock of 'big houses' in the early twentieth century reflected the agency of Sligo's landlords from the early eighteenth century through to the last years of the nineteenth century. Likewise, the demesnes laid out and developed as sites for these houses also evolved during the period, reflecting both the needs and

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aspirations of the owners. The landscapes and composition of individual demesnes may be garnered from an examination of the 25-inch Ordnance Survey maps and individual estate maps that have survived. Landlordism as a system was gradually deconstructed and former tenants became owner occupiers of their farms and new farms were created through the agency of both the Congested Districts Board and the Irish Land Commission. While this was a fraught experience in other parts of Ireland, it seems that many Sligo landlords engaged with and facilitated the government led initiatives from an early stage. In the long run this appears to have paid off, as the 'big houses' of Sligo and most of their owners weathered the revolutionary period well when compared to their peers elsewhere.

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of the fasces is strength through unity. Beehives were representative of industry'. See <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/32402010/beehive-lodge-union-co-sligo> [accessed 15 March 2024].

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56. For more on the involvement of these and other Sligo families in the co-operative movement and other enterprises in Sligo see Padraig Deignan, *The Protestant community in Sligo, 1914-1949* (Dublin, 2010), pp 210-36. See also Proinnsias Breathnach's essay in this volume.
57. Deignan, *Protestant community in Sligo*, pp 331-33.
58. Some of the sporting activities of Major Charles Kean O'Hara are detailed in the O'Hara Papers, held in the Manuscripts Department, National Library of Ireland, see NLI, MS. 36,435/1-17.
59. Deignan, *Protestant community in Sligo*, pp 321-31. For the role of Walker and Wood –Martin see Aideen Ireland in this volume; for the Yeats family see the essays by Roy Foster and Charles Travis, respectively, in this volume.
60. For Annaghmore see <https://www.annaghmore.ie/>; for Coopershill see <https://www.coopershill.com/>; for Carrowgarry House see <https://carrowgarryfarm.ie/> and <https://carrow.ie/> and for Temple House see <https://www.templehouse.ie/> [all accessed 12 March 2024].
61. McTernan, *Houses of Sligo*, p. 124.
62. For a potted history of developments at Hazelwood during the twentieth century see Guthrie-Jones, *The Wynnes of Sligo and Leitrim*, pp 91-3.
63. 'Ambitious plans aim to make Sligo's Hazelwood a top tourism site' *Sligo Champion*, 18 Oct. 2022.
64. <https://www.romanticcastlesireland.com/our-castles> [accessed 12 March 2024].
65. McTernan, *Sligo families*, pp 118-19.
66. McTernan, *Houses of Sligo*, p. 61.
67. Ibid., p. 178.
68. For more on the demesne at Lissadell and to a lesser extent those at Markree and Hazelwood in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and William Butler Yeats connection with these see Edward

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Malins and Patrick Bowe, *Irish gardens and demesnes from 1830* (London, 1980), pp 138-41 and Dermot James, *The Gore-Booths of Lissadell* (Dublin, 2004).

69. Details on the restoration of Lissadell may be found at <https://lissadellhouse.com/> [last accessed 13 March 2024].
70. 'Iconic property on the verge of collapse' *The Western People*, 5 Jan. 2024 and 'Historic house in Co. Sligo in danger of collapse after years of neglect' *The Irish Times*, 15 Jan. 2024.