

Piracy, property and politics: Charles Vallancey and the Down Survey of Ireland

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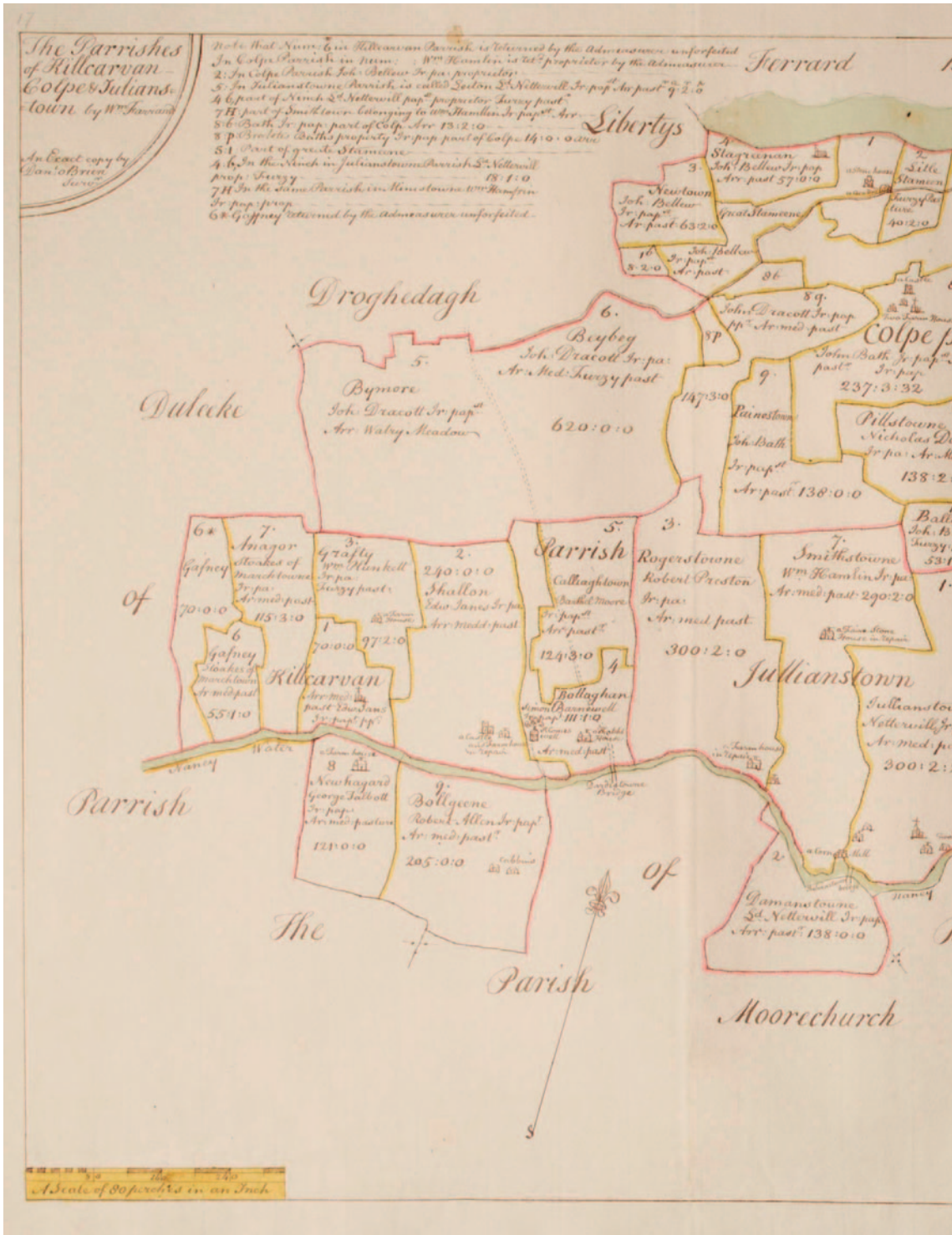
IT IS EASY TO TAKE FOR GRANTED THE AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF MAPPING IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY Ireland. The simple means by which maps can be accessed, and the range of organisations producing such products, stands in stark contrast to the pre-Ordnance Survey era. For those in need of mapping in eighteenth-century Ireland, particularly land surveyors, options could be extremely limited and nationwide geographic resources difficult to access. This essay examines the use of the Down Survey in eighteenth-century land-surveying as a reference source, and documents General Charles Vallancey's 1789 mission to Paris to create a complete copy of a dubiously acquired set of original Down Survey maps (Plates 1-3).

THE DOWN SURVEY

THE MAIN AND MOST REGULARLY CONSULTED REFERENCE MAPPING AVAILABLE TO eighteenth-century surveyors was the 1655/56 Down Survey of English scientist and cartographer Sir William Petty (1623-1687) (Plate 4). This survey was conducted as a method of establishing the extent of confiscated lands in Ireland after Cromwell's campaign, so that it could be distributed to soldiers of the New Model Army as a form of payment for their service.¹

During the eighteenth century the Down Survey was kept in the Surveyor General's office in the Lower Yard of Dublin Castle. According to surveyor and author Robert Gibson writing in the mid-eighteenth century, the survey received its name because the Stafford Survey that had preceded it had consisted entirely of terriers – or catalogues of

*1 – George Chinnery, GENERAL CHARLES VALLANCEY
c.1799, oil on canvas, 123 x 97 cm (detail) (by permission of the Royal Irish Academy © RIA)*

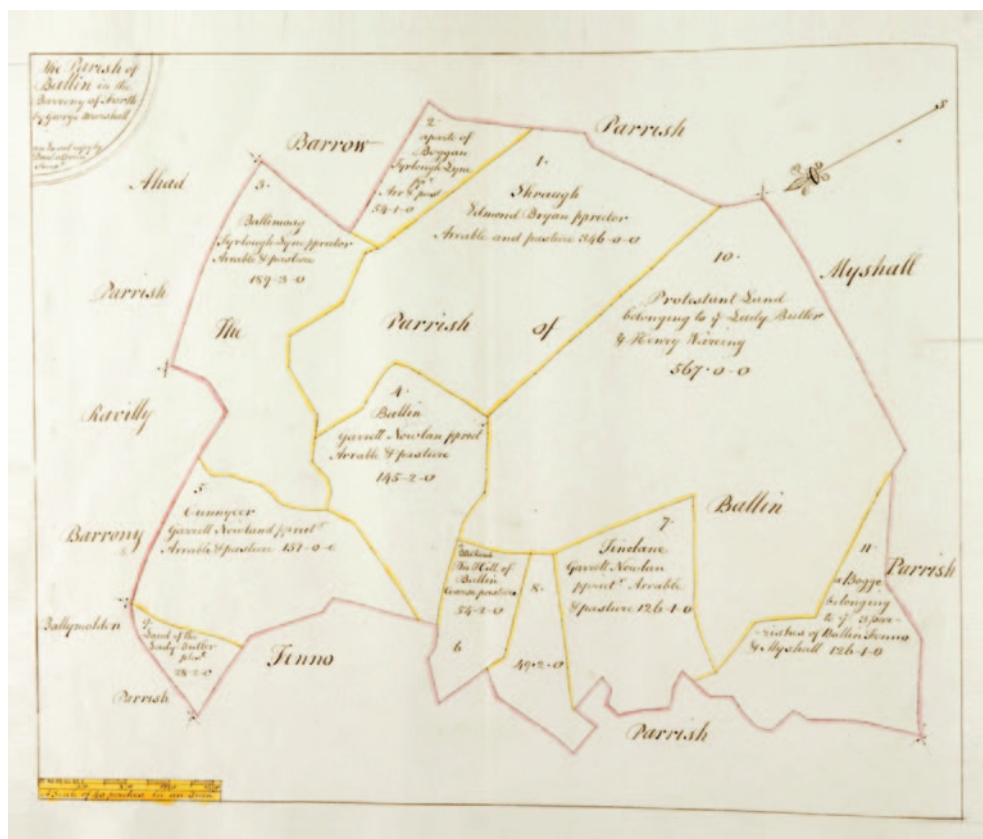




property – accompanied with basic outline maps of the property in question.² The Down Survey had been laid down onto maps – hence ‘Down’ Survey.³ The survey originally consisted of books containing barony maps, parish maps of each barony, an abstract or sheet referencing each map, and a certificate at the beginning of each volume signed by Petty.⁴ In 1711 a fire at the Treasury office on Essex Street damaged and destroyed several of the Down Survey maps. As a result of this incident, a complete copy of the entire survey was not held in the Surveyor General’s office. Of the original 1,430 maps, 67 of the baronial maps were destroyed, 130 were damaged and two were missing. Of the parochial maps, 391 of the original 780 items were either damaged or destroyed.⁵ Sir Thomas Taylor, 2nd Baronet of Kells (1686-1757) copied many of the Down Survey maps before the Essex Street fire, but this was far from complete compared to the original set.⁶

This lack of a complete set of property reference maps for Ireland represented a major problem for eighteenth-century land surveyors. Surveyors often referred to the Down Survey as a method of establishing the accuracy of their own maps,⁷ and as a consequence it was held in high regard by both surveyors and the civic authorities, being described by Gibson as of ‘great use to gentlemen; though the Down Surveys only, are those allowed by the laws of the land to be final and decisive’,⁸ and ‘This

2 – William Farriand, *THE PARISHES OF KILLCARVAN, COLPE AND JULIANSTOWN, c.1655, copied by Daniel O’Brien, c.1780* (courtesy National Library of Ireland © NLI ms. 716)



survey was laid down with the chain, and with wonderful accuracy considering the period at which it was executed.’⁹

Being the most highly regarded reference source for geographic data in Ireland during the eighteenth century, those involved with the Down Survey collection sought to maintain its reputation for accuracy and its privileged legal status. When Irish surveyors consulted and copied the Down Survey, the Deputy Surveyor General would attach a note to the copied maps stating that surveyors had consulted an official source of information.¹⁰ These notes were brief, yet contained enough information to confirm that the surveyor’s work and the Down Survey maps consulted came from the same area, and that the maps the surveyor was copying were legitimate: ‘This trace, for so much, agreeth with the map of the Down Survey taken from the Parish of Santry in the County of Dublin remaining on Record in the office of his Majesties Surveyor General of Lands in Dublin Castle.’¹¹ Such notes are rare in Irish estate mapping, yet they occasionally appear in map collections.¹²

Even rarer are surveyor’s comparisons of their own work to that of the Down Survey. Michael Kenny, a Dublin-based surveyor in the late eighteenth century, enclosed one such comparison in a note to the Domville family, regarding a map of their lands in Glasnevin:

opposite 3 – George Marshall,
*THE PARISH OF BALLIN IN THE
 BARRONY OF FORTH, c.1655,*
 copied by Daniel O’Brien, c.1780
 (courtesy National Library of Ireland
 © NLI ms. 716)

4 – Edwin Sandys (engr.),
SIR WILLIAM PETTY, 1683
 in *HIBERNIAE DELINEATIO* (London, 1685)
 (courtesy National Library of Ireland)



Above you have the map of that field I surveyed it with all the accuracy in my power, and make it 4A[cres] 3R[oods] 2P[erches], cast it up various ways, and found able to answer the same, what I made of it, in the General [Down] Survey, I can't tell, as I have no paper related to your estate thus in one line from A to B that the gripe was uncertain much defrauded but on enquiring strictly, find it was your gripe therefore brought it in...¹³

Despite the esteem in which it was held by Ireland's surveyors, the conditions in which the surviving maps were stored in Dublin Castle were far from ideal. In 1824 statesman and author John Wilson Croker (1780-1857) described the condition of the remaining maps:

My attention was turned to the survey of Ireland a great many years ago, from circumstances of having had occasion to examine the Down Survey, as it is called. I found that survey in, I thought, a very perilous state in point of location, and a very impaired state in point of preservation. It was situated in, I believe, on the upper stories of a very old building, and very liable to accident by fire; some parts of it, as well I recollect, bore the marks of having already suffered by fire, and as the sur-

vey itself was considered of great importance to Ireland [it being admitted as legal evidence in certain cases], I thought I would be wise to guard against the total loss of the survey by fire, as well as the slower but equally sure process of destruction which it was undergoing, by the mode in which those who had occasion to consult it were allowed both to handle the sheets themselves, and to make tracings or drafts from it.¹⁴

Missing maps could also result in a wasted trip by a surveyor to Dublin Castle, such as in the case of Scottish surveyor William Bald (1789-1857), who, in the same year, described such an occasion:

Before leaving Dublin, to commence the territorial survey of Clare, I was anxious to examine to what extent they possessed documents of the county, in the Record Tower, Dublin Castle, where Sir William Petty's maps are kept. I found only three baronies of the county of Clare. I was anxious to take outlines of them, in order to compare with the surveys that were to be executed. I found the price high, and declined.¹⁵

In 1762, copies of the maps could be made for 6s 8d, and a search of the maps without copying them cost 5s. Gibson advised that the most important issue about making traces of the Down Survey was to establish the scale at which the copy was made. It appears to have been a common mistake for surveyors to copy the map but fail to compare the scale differences on their own maps. In his *Treatise of Practical Surveying* (1762), Gibson noted that: 'Of this I have seen many instances; yet the surveyor would make it do, as mis-closures are many times forced to do; the consequence of either, the most unskilful surveyor cannot be ignorant of.'¹⁶

CHARLES VALLANCEY'S MISSION TO PARIS

GIVEN THE RAPID DETERIORATION OF THE EXISTING DOWN SURVEY MAPS, COUPLED with the fact that many of the original set had been lost forever, Irish surveying was placed at a distinct disadvantage. Originally, more than one complete copy of the Down Survey had been made, one for storage in Ireland, the other to be stored in England in Petty's private collection. During its transportation to England, the ship carrying part of Petty's copy was captured by a French privateer in the Irish Sea, and the Down Survey maps were taken to the Bibliothèque Royale in Paris.¹⁷ In 1774 Simon Harcourt, 1st Earl Harcourt (1714-1777), former British ambassador to Paris and Lieutenant General of Ireland, accompanied by the French Colonel Blaquiere, visited the Bibliothèque Royale where he found a complete copy of Petty's baronial maps. The Irish government, upon learning of the existence of this set, immediately requested that the French return them; the French, by way of response, claimed that the maps in question

had ‘been mislaid’.¹⁸ At the time it was presumed that the French were in fact creating their own map of Ireland from their copy of the Down Survey; however, this could not be proven by those in the Irish parliament.¹⁹ The matter was taken up again in 1789 when General Charles Vallancey and his assistant, Alexander Taylor, went to Paris at the request of the Irish parliament and with the permission of the King of France, Louis XVI, to make copies of the Down Survey maps that were missing from the Surveyor General’s office in Dublin.

Charles Vallancey (1725-1812) (Plate 1) was an Eton-educated, British military officer whose career was broad and far-reaching. Heavily engaged with canal surveying, his greatest cartographic achievement was a military survey of Ireland completed in 1805.²⁰ Vallancey’s correspondence from Paris during the spring of 1789 reveals that despite both the co-operation of the French government and the negotiating talents of the Duke of Dorset, several practical problems, specifically related to the procedures of the Bibliothèque Royale, hindered Vallancey’s efficiency in producing copies of the Down Survey:

I take the liberty to show you, my lord [Leopold de Biretue], that is almost impossible to fulfil the object of my mission in the king’s library.

- 1: These maps cannot be copied like a manuscript. It is necessary to trace the lines on paper by the aid of the suns rays or a torch, of which the reflection crosses a glass constructed for the purpose
- 2: There are 350 maps. The king’s library is only open to the public twice a week, from 9 till 12 & by the specific kindness of Mr. Le Noir, I have obtained permission to be there myself from 9 – 12 in order to carry out any work. It will be impossible to complete the copy in 12 months, that I could finish in two, if I were placed in a convenient situation. I hope you will consider these circumstances, my lord, & I take the liberty of asking you to let me dispense with the rules and regulations of the king’s library on this occasion, and give me the permission to take these maps to my lodging...²¹

Unsurprisingly, the Bibliothèque Royale officials refused to allow Vallancey to remove sensitive map collections to his private lodgings. Vallancey was therefore obliged to follow the Bibliothèque Royale’s rules for the remainder of his stay.

The library’s official response may not have been as unhelpful as it appears at first. The practicality of removing a large collection of maps to a building without proper supervision was obviously one concern of the library officials. However, another, more potentially devious problem may have been their reason for denying Vallancey’s request – that of espionage. If the collection of maps were out of the supervision of library staff, there would be nothing to stop Vallancey replacing some of the most militarily strategic maps, such as of important towns or landing sites, with altered copies. Vallancey was, after all, a military officer of a foreign and competing power, so such concerns were not entirely

without justification. This issue was further highlighted in a letter to Vallancey from his associate, George Store:

Having shown the Duke of Dorset your letter of yesterday and the paragraph in that of Mr. George Younge, which I return enclosed, I am directed by his grace to inform you that Mons. De Montmereir so fervently refused that the original surveys and papers should be given up in exchange for copies & even to lay the request before his Majesty, that he is perused any further application for that purpose will never be attempted with success. May there not be some risk in any underhand attempt to effect an exchange before you have secured the copies complete? Excuse this hint from, Dear Sir, Your very faithful humble servant.²²

Store's friendly warning, that the mission may be put at risk should the library notice unauthorised replacements of original maps with copies, highlights the difficulties that Vallancey was dealing with. In the end, Vallancey and Taylor spent two years working in Paris, with Taylor and an unnamed French engraver copying the maps under Vallancey's supervision.²³

RETURN TO IRELAND

UPON THEIR RETURN FROM FRANCE IN LATE 1790, A SERIOUS DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE in the Irish House of Commons, the Irish House of Lords, and among the surveying community about whether Vallancey's maps should be admissible as evidence in the same manner as the original Down Survey maps prepared by Petty. The main discussion focused on whether the differences between the French maps copied by Vallancey and the original Down Survey maps were so great as to make the Vallancey maps useless. They were, in fact, Irish copies of French copies of British originals, with inherent flaws introduced at each stage through the use of manual copying methods.

The propagation of error through copying was a genuine concern. The original Down Survey baronial maps were produced at a scale of 160 perches to an inch, and occasionally at 320 perches an inch. The parochial maps' scale varied between 40 and 80 perches to an inch. The French maps had, in fact, been copied, and their scale reduced to such an extent that, while the original version of the Down Survey came in thirty-one volumes, those copied by Vallancey only came in two.²⁴ The Deputy Surveyor General at the time, Mathew Hancock, was asked to examine the Vallancey maps and to offer his professional opinion to the Irish parliament. Hancock compared Vallancey's maps with the original baronial maps and found several errors, albeit all relatively minor. In fact, Hancock's main opposition to the Vallancey maps was the scale at which they were produced:

General Vallancey's copy is a transcript of the copy of the original baronial maps only, defective of every other likeness or means of information; too minute in many

instances to afford the strong contour by which original boundaries, if defaced by time, could be accurately defined: too confined sometimes in space to declare the quality, or ascertain landmarks, such as castles, churches, &c. &c.; in some instances, not very many indeed, erroneous, and differing from the originals as to figure, but totally deficient as to every other source of information afforded by the originals. To authenticate them generally and entirely as records, might be dangerous; partially, where the originals have been destroyed, some use may be safely made of them; but, in no instances should they be admitted to serve as proofs of trails of boundaries, unless when none of the originals can be had.²⁵

The law lords and chief officers of the time, lord chief justices John Scott, Earl of Clonmell (1739-1798), Richard Boyle, Lord Carleton (1727-1807) and Barry Maxwell, Earl of Farnham (1723-1800), as adjudicators ruled that the Vallancey maps should not be considered on a par with the original Down Survey maps as the differences in scale represented a problem, and, more seriously, any new maps introduced into the legal system might lead to ‘endless litigations between the old and new interests; that the Statute of Limitation sufficiently protected the crown, the church, and the possessors undisturbed, for 20 years of undisputed tenure; therefore they deem it inexpedient to legalise these copies.’²⁶

In summary, the House of Lords ruled, in 1791, that the Vallancey maps were not eligible as evidence in court cases and did not carry the same legal status as the original Down Survey maps.

A SECOND ROUND OF DISCUSSIONS IN 1812

DESPITE THE ORIGINAL HOUSE OF LORDS DECISION, THE VALLANCEY MAPS WERE AGAIN discussed by a committee on the Down Survey convened in 1812. In this second discussion, several surveyors were asked for their opinions on the Vallancey maps. More specifically, they were invited to comment on the potential benefits or problems encountered should the new maps be deemed eligible as evidence in court. The main argument in favour of legitimising the Vallancey maps was that the Down Survey was one of the most important surveying projects ever conducted in Ireland, and that to have a complete copy, whether original or not, was therefore in the public interest.²⁷

Vallancey’s assistant, Alexander Taylor, was called before the committee and was asked to explain the differences between the Vallancey maps and the original survey, as well as his opinion of the legal quality of the copies; the French baronial maps appear to have carried more information, in the form of place names, than the original Down Survey equivalents. Taylor reasoned that the French had augmented the baronial maps with data from the parochial maps so as to provide as much information as possible on each individual map.²⁸ As to why the Vallancey maps were not made legal, Taylor suspected that

the Irish parliament had been influenced by parties whose property interests may have been affected by the appearance of the new maps:

...an ecclesiastical person of high rank in the church, and since deceased, had taken some notes from the new copy, which seemed to affect some property of the church in his diocese, and he was thought likely to form a claim on these notes: that this, the witness considered as the cause of preventing the measure proceeding; as Government became apprehensive that the measure would affect individuals, if carried into execution. But all this, he says, he has only from report, not from actual knowledge.²⁹

Taylor still insisted that if the Vallancey maps were used in individual cases, they would be of some benefit.

Noted land surveyor John Brownrigg (1748-1838) was also asked to examine the Vallancey maps and to make a report on their usefulness compared to the Down Survey. Brownrigg had examined the Vallancey maps on two separate occasions and had found them to be accurate maps, if slightly small to be truly useful. He also noted that it was more common for the parochial maps to be submitted as evidence in court rather than the baronial maps that were copied in Paris, thus reducing the relevance of the Vallancey maps. He mentioned that he had consulted another copy of the original Down Survey maps around 1772, then held in Ireland at Shelburne House on St Stephen's Green in Dublin, and that it would take considerable time to ascertain the accuracy of the Shelburne and Vallancey maps together compared to the original Down Survey collection.³⁰ Apart from the Shelburne copy, two other sets were known to have existed in Ireland. One was copied for Sir Thomas Taylor, 1st Earl of Bective, sometime before 1711, and the other by Robert Rochfort, the Surveyor General, around 1787. Following Rochfort's death, his widow gave them to his executor, Gustavus Hume Rochfort of Westmeath, who was still in possession of them in 1812.³¹

Surveyors Henry Harding and a Mr J. Fowler were also asked to examine and compare the Vallancey and Down Survey maps jointly. They reached the same conclusion as Taylor, finding the French maps to be a combination of information from both the baronial and parochial Down Survey maps. They failed to comment further on the subject.³²

The final surveyor consulted by the committee was A.R. Neville (d.1828), Dublin Corporation's city surveyor, who had employed a combination of the Vallancey and Down maps in the course of his work. Neville had been surveying an estate owned by the Blue-coat Hospital near Nodstown, county Tipperary. Half of this estate was covered by the surviving Down Survey maps, while the other half of the original map had been destroyed in the fire of 1711. The destroyed section, however, had been copied by Vallancey in France. The accompanying terrier of the original Down map stated that the lands at Nodstown had an area of 668 acres, 1 rood and 24 perches, and by using this figure Neville was therefore able to confirm that the map produced by Vallancey was indeed correct. As regards whether the Vallancey maps should have been made publicly avail-

able, Neville simply stated that in some individual cases they would be of use, such as his Nodstown example, but could not comment on the complete absorption of the Vallancey catalogue.³³

Once again, given the potential chaos that a new set of data could cause on existing land ownership court rulings, the Vallancey maps were denied official legal status equivalent to the Down Survey maps.³⁴ The Select Committee on the Down Survey found that

...when a great part of the Down Survey has been actually out of existence for a whole century, a sudden restoration of it, or a substitution of a document to supply its place, were to be effected, however well authenticated the restored maps might be, or however well satisfied we might be of the accuracy of the maps restored or substituted; we cannot undertake to say that we can clearly foresee all the consequences that might follow from such becoming evidence, or pronounce decisively, that those consequences would be plainly beneficial to the public.³⁵

In addition,

...the Statute of Limitations, in cases between individuals, might perhaps in many cases prevent any apprehended mischief. But we have not before us nor can we expect satisfactory evidence, that claims to which such statutes would not apply, might not originate from the measure of making those maps original records, and property be thus disturbed, which has been long quietly and peaceably enjoyed, and transmitted from man to man in all the modes of legal purchase, without apprehension of any such claims being made, or of any defect in the title.³⁶

There was some concern raised as to the condition of both the Vallancey and Down maps and the manner in which they were stored. The Vallancey maps were in very good condition overall in 1812, yet they were being stored in at the bottom of a deep chest in the Surveyor General's office in Dublin Castle. The maps were held in two large portfolios, each containing over a hundred maps, which the committee felt was far too cumbersome for regular use, as 'Every time they are examined they are liable to injury, from the weight of the portfolios, the depth of the chest, and the want of room and connivance in the office to open and make use of a large set of maps with safety.'³⁷

CONCLUSION

VALLANCEY'S MISSION TO PARIS AND ITS OUTCOME DEMONSTRATES BOTH THE advantages and disadvantages related to map compilation and copying. Although there was a distinct need to replace the maps damaged or destroyed in the 1711 fire, the manual nature of the copying process introduced the possibilities of errors being present in a document that potentially could be referenced in the courts of law. It also highlighted the limited resources that were available to those involved in property bound-

ary land surveys, as there was no suitable replacement to the Down Survey or an alternative map collection. While there were distinct benefits to the Irish surveying community through Vallancey's work, the subsequent legal technicalities took precedent. It is a reminder that surveying and property law are intertwined and often difficult, if not impossible, to separate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

Report *Report from select committee on survey and valuation of Ireland*, [445], H.C. 1824, viii.79
 Gibson Robert Gibson, *Treatise of Practical Surveying* (Dublin, 1762)
 NLI National Library of Ireland

- ¹ Thomas Aiskew Larcom, *The History of the Survey of Ireland: commonly called the Down Survey* (Dublin, 1851) appendix 1.
- ² Evidence of Alexander Nimo, *Report*, p.70.
- ³ Gibson, 284.
- ⁴ *Report from select committee on survey and valuation of Ireland*, 135.
- ⁵ Evidence of William Bald, *Report*, 62.
- ⁶ Gibson, 285.
- ⁷ This method is still applied in the same manner, as modern surveyors often use Ordnance Survey Ireland maps as their reference dataset.
- ⁸ Gibson, 285.
- ⁹ Evidence of William Bald, *Report*, 62.
- ¹⁰ NLI, MS 2789 (59), John Longfield, Lands in Killenaule, Tipperary, 1817; *Report*, 34, 129, 134; Gibson, 286.
- ¹¹ NLI, Domvile papers, MS 11,937 (11), note by Richard Holmes Deputy Surveyor General of Lands, Santry, county Dublin, 1766.
- ¹² NLI, Domvile papers, MS 11,937 (48), unknown author, Corbally, county Dublin, 1766; Domvile papers, MS 11,937 (50), James Molly, Santry, 1764; Domvile papers, MS 11,937 (54), unknown author, Rathleigh, county Meath, date unknown.
- ¹³ NLI, Domvile papers, MS 11,937 (20), note by Michael Kenny, Glasnevin, 1804.
- ¹⁴ Evidence of John Wilson Croker, *Report*, 34.
- ¹⁵ Evidence of William Bald, *Report*, 66.
- ¹⁶ Gibson, 286.
- ¹⁷ Evidence of Alexander Nimo, *Report*, 78.

- ¹⁸ *Report*, 133.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*
- ²⁰ Vallancey was also known for his ambitious, though ultimately erroneous, theories about Irish antiquity, which brought him more attention than his cartographic work; Charles Vallancey, *An essay on the primitive inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland* (Dublin, 1807); Charles Vallancey, *A vindication of the ancient history of Ireland* (Dublin, 1786); Charles Vallancey, *Grammar of the Ibero-Celtic, or Irish language* (Dublin, 1773).
- ²¹ NLI, MS 1614, Charles Vallancey to Leopold de Biretue, Paris, 14th March 1789.
- ²² NLI, MS 1614, George Store to Charles Vallancey, Paris, 6th June 1789.
- ²³ *Report*, 78.
- ²⁴ *Report*, 132.
- ²⁵ Evidence of Mathew Hancock, *ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Report*, 134.
- ²⁷ *Report*, 130.
- ²⁸ *Report*, 131.
- ²⁹ Evidence of Alexander Taylor, *Report*, 313.
- ³⁰ *Report*, 313.
- ³¹ Evidence of John Brownrigg, *Report*, 134.
- ³² Evidence of Henry Harding and J. Fowler, *Report*, 134.
- ³³ Evidence of A.R. Neville, *Report*, 135.
- ³⁴ *Report*, 129.
- ³⁵ *Report*, 130.
- ³⁶ *ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Report*, 136.
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