



# Thomas Leggett (fl.1740-1802), landscape gardener

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THE SUCCESS OF LANCELOT ‘CAPABILITY’ BROWN (1716-1783) AS THE PREMIER LANDSCAPE gardener in England in the middle of the eighteenth century resulted, as is well known, in the emergence of a school of landscape gardeners who practiced their profession by designing parkland in a similar ‘Brownian’ style. Among these was William Emes (1729/30-1803) who had an extensive practice, mainly in the West Midlands and North Wales.<sup>1</sup> Emes, to judge from his surviving manuscript plans, such as that for Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire, practiced in a landscape style which may be summarised as consisting of parkland involving broad expanses of informal pasture broken by single trees, or trees in clumps, with a winding sheet of water, often manmade, all enclosed within a perimeter plantation of woodland. His successful practice necessitated his employment of assistants, one of whom was Thomas Leggett (fl.1740-1801/02) who, from 1764, worked with him as clerk-of-works on his ten-year transformation of the important park of Eaton Hall in Cheshire.<sup>2</sup>

By 1769, Leggett had apparently become sufficiently confident to prepare a plan for parkland around the new Brockhampton House, Herefordshire (Plate 2). Signed and dated, it shows typical elements of a Brownian landscape such as perimeter woodland screens, a serpentine lake, its ends concealed in woodland, and its interior liberally scattered with those isolated roundish clumps of trees, which were criticised as unnatural by a later generation of landscapers.<sup>3</sup> Though altered over time and presented by the National Trust today as associated with an earlier moated manor house, sufficient elements survive to suggest that the plan was not only an eye-catching pattern on paper, but duly executed. During 1770, Leggett found himself working at Tern Hall in Shropshire, an estate that was then being transformed into what is known today as Attingham Park.<sup>4</sup> Records show the ordering in that year of thousands of oak, hornbeam, beech and Scots pine that is consistent with what must have been a major new park planting. In the same year and that following, the purchase of smaller quantities of shrubs, some flowering, some evergreen, suggests the creation of an ornamental shrubbery along what is now known as The Mile

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*1 – Map of Charleville Forest, drawn by J. Bury, 1844*

*A plan devoted to the River Clodiagh as it passed through the demesne indicates the importance of its riverine landscape with its serpentine course and many islands. (courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)*



2 – *Plan of Brockhampton Park, Herefordshire, by Thomas Leggett*

*Leggett's plan, signed and dated 1760, shows belts of perimeter woodland together with an interior of scattered single and clumps of trees and a serpentine lake, indicative of a style of landscaping introduced by Capability Brown. (courtesy National Trust)*

Walk, extending from the house to the walled kitchen garden. It is interesting to note that the renowned landscape gardener, Humphrey Repton, left this walk untouched when he reorganised the park from 1798, and that, now known as the Pleasure Ground, it is being currently restored by the National Trust.<sup>5</sup> In the same year, an advertisement was placed in a paper in the locality to advertise a clearance sale of the household goods and extensive nursery stock belonging to one Thomas Leggett. This may be the same person as he who was then working as a landscape gardener, as many of these men started their careers as nurserymen at that period.

However, the settled routine of a nurseryman was incompatible with the peripatetic life of a consultant landscape gardener as he followed the locations of his commissions. This was especially so in Leggett's case, as he not only designed park improvements but stayed behind to conduct them. In fact, the various advertisements he placed in Irish newspapers during the course of his later career requested his correspondents to send their replies to a number of different forwarding addresses. The 1770 advertisement read as follows:

#### TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION

Upon Wednesday, 14th June inst at the dwelling house of Mr. Thomas Leggett of Ellesmere in the county of Salop.

The genuine Household Goods, Plate, China and Furniture belonging to the said Mr. Thomas Leggett also a Nursery of a great Collection of the best kind of Apples, Pears, Plumbs, Cherries and Forest Trees, Flowering Shrubs and Evergreens from this Year's Sowing to Four Feet high, all in exceeding good Order. The Whole to be viewed till the Time of Sale.

N.B. All persons to whom the said Mr. Thomas Leggett stands justly indebted to are desired to send an account thereof, to Mr. Joseph Wall, and Mr. John Mullinex, of Ellesmere aforesaid, or to Mr. Edward Davies, Attorney at Law at Ellesmere aforesaid, who are authorized to receive same.<sup>6</sup>

During the following year, Leggett was working at Wynnstay Hall, Denbighshire, in North

3 – *Watercolour of Wynnstay Hall, Denbighshire, Wales, by John Ingleby, 1793*

*At Wynnstay, where Leggett worked c.1771, islets with mature and semi-mature trees were formed by drawing lake water around them, a device that was later used by Leggett at Rathfarnham Castle.  
(courtesy National Library of Wales)*



Wales, one of the most important eighteenth-century landscape parks in Wales. Payments to him and to his foreman, Edward Keightley, and, further, to Keightley in the following year, are recorded (Plate 3).<sup>7</sup> Leggett was employing an assistant at this time as his nursery business was still in operation, it having failed to sell after his 1770 advertisement. In June 1775, in a second attempt at a clearance sale, a copy of the 1770 advertisement appeared in a different local newspaper.<sup>8</sup> After this, there is a gap of some six years when we know little of Leggett's whereabouts and activity. It has been suggested, however, that he worked on the layout of the landscape around a new neoclassical house at Woodhouse, near Oswestry in Shropshire, which was completed in 1774.<sup>9</sup>

In 1781 he arrived in Ireland, which was announced by an advertisement in *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*:

Planting &c – Just arrived from England, Thomas Leggett, who from an extensive practice in ornamenting demesnes in England and Wales, would wish to be employed by Noblemen and Gentlemen during his stay in this kingdom, as he flatters himself he is conversant with what will create beauty. Any commands will be received at Messrs. Bullen and Webb's Nursery in New Street.<sup>10</sup>

His original intention was to stay just a short while. After the initial generation of improvers in the naturalistic landscape style, such as Capability Brown and William Emes, there was, from the 1760s, an ever expanding number who specialised in this style of landscape design in Britain.<sup>11</sup> So, it was perhaps for this reason that Leggett decided to try his hand in the less crowded field in Ireland. His introduction may have come from Robert Mylne, the architect of Woodhouse who had been working intermittently in Ireland, or from Mylne's brother, William, who was practicing as an engineer in Dublin, or indeed from Thomas Cooley, Mylne's clerk-of-works, who was establishing an Irish architectural practice.<sup>12</sup>

The enthusiasm for the naturalistic landscape style had been evidenced in Ireland already, as was shown by the career of Peter Shanley, a talented native practitioner, but there remained an opening for a professional like Leggett, with his first-hand knowledge





4 – ENTRANCE GATE TO RATHFARNHAM CASTLE, by Thomas Walmsley, c.1780

*The early landscaping was influenced by an enthusiasm for Classical architecture, as is shown by this new entrance gate, its design based on the Porta Portese. (courtesy The Castletown Trust)*

of English practice.<sup>13</sup> A second newspaper advertisement, three years later – necessary, as the long-established Bullen and Webb’s nursery which Leggett had been using as a forwarding address was going into liquidation – shows that he was working in county Galway on the west coast as well as in and around Dublin.<sup>14</sup>

#### THOMAS LEGGETT

Ornamental Gardener etc., etc.

Any letters addressed to him at Newtown Bellew, Castle Blakeney; Mr Power’s, apothecary, Galway, Mr Bray’s seed merchant, Dublin – shall be duly attended to.<sup>15</sup>

It is only from another advertisement that we can gauge the number of Leggett’s significant commissions, when in 1790 he was obliged to counter a rumour that he was about to leave the country. The rumour may have gained credence as he had not acquired a residence for himself.

#### THOMAS LEGGETT

Ornamental Planter, Improver of Lands etc.

Who has had the honour of designing and conducting the works of some of the first demesnes in Ireland – as Rathfarnham Castle, Lord Loftus; Temple Hill, Lord Clonmell; Charleville, Charles William Bury Esq; Castle Mount Garrett [*sic*], Dominic Gef [*sic*] Brown Esq; Marlay, The Rt Hon. David LaTouche and etc. etc.

etc. respectfully informs the public that all commands addressed to him at 108 Abbey Street, Dublin, Mr. Keightly's , Harold's Cross, Mr Power, Galway, or Mylagh, Castle-Blakeney shall be most punctually attended to.

Leggett presumes on this opportunity to contradict the report of his having any attention to leave the kingdom.<sup>16</sup>

Since the Elizabethan period, Rathfarnham Castle had been one of the principal seats on the outskirts of Dublin. Henry, Lord Loftus (1709-1783), 1st Earl of Ely, began the belated modernisation of the castle's interior, commissioning designs from the pioneers of neo-classicism, James 'Athenian' Stuart and Sir William Chambers. His enthusiasm for Classical architecture was also evident in the background to his family's portraits by Angelika Kaufmann (1771) and Joshua Reynolds (c.1775).<sup>17</sup> It is no surprise to find this enthusiasm extended to the improvement of his 400-acre parkland, beginning in 1779 with the construction of a new gate modelled on a Roman triumphal arch, the Porta Portese (Plate 4).<sup>18</sup> The gate's design would have been available in an engraving in one of the widely circulated volumes of Giuseppe Vasi's views of Rome.<sup>19</sup> The entrance drive then ascended, in a series of serpentines, up a wooded defile, crossing and re-crossing a stream along which no fewer than seven cascades were later marked, together with a grotto and a well-placed statue, presumably a Classical figure, to emerge eventually by a circular, peripteral temple by the high plateau on which the castle stands (Plate 5).<sup>20</sup> Unlike other circular temples erected in parkland in the eighteenth century such as the Temple of Ancient Virtue at Stowe, modelled on the ancient Temple of the Sybil at Tivoli near Rome, and unlike the similar edifice shown in the Kaufmann portrait of the family, its central drum was of two stories, like that of Bramante's Tempietto in Rome, engravings of which by Vasi and Palladio would also have been available to Lord Ely.<sup>21</sup> Ely died,

#### 5 – Circular peripteral temple, Rathfarnham Castle, Dublin

*The early landscape continued to be influenced by an enthusiasm for Classical architecture that was exemplified by a peripteral temple modelled on Bramante's Tempietto in Rome. (photograph by David Davison, c.1970)*





6 – Rathfarnham Castle, watercolour by George Holmes, 1794

*The setting of Rathfarnham, where Leggett was employed, is shown as an open, sheep-grazed pasture of a kind favoured by Capability Brown but which was later criticised as a setting for a country house on account of the bareness of its aspect.*  
(courtesy Rathfarnham Castle)

childless, in 1783 to be succeeded in his ownership of Rathfarnham by his maternal nephew, Charles Tottenham Loftus, and from 1789 by Viscount Loftus whom Leggett identified in 1790 as his employer at Rathfarnham. The neoclassical structures of his predecessor were left untouched, the circular temple surviving until the mid-twentieth century, the gateway still in existence and maintained though separated from what was the demesne.<sup>22</sup> Two paintings, dated 1794, celebrated Leggett's transformation of the plateau on which the castle stands. The castle's setting was one of wide, gently undulating, sheep-grazed pasture, its perimeter defined by a line of trees in one direction and by more substantial mountain-backed woodland in another (Plate 6). One painting shows a patch of sunlight, the result of a break in the clouds overhead, relieving the overall bare aspect of the pasture that was a later criticism of the designs of Brownian landscape design. The second painting shows a mountain stream which had been widened into a small lake, its waters having been conducted around an islet characterised by mature and semi-mature trees in a manner already depicted at Wynnstay, where Leggett worked in 1772 (Plate 7).

It was common for a professional landscape gardener of the time to be consulted also on the erection of greenhouses.<sup>23</sup> Leggett's expertise in greenhouse design is evident in his 1798 announcement of his new kind of fruit-forcing house,<sup>24</sup> so it is not unlikely



that he was asked to advise on what was described in 1801 as a ‘great quantity of glass’ in the walled garden at Rathfarnham.<sup>25</sup> According to the later landscape gardener, James Fraser, the most magnificent of the glasshouses had been erected on the same plan as those at Hampton Court and Kew, and was associated in its layout with an old ‘Dutch’ garden, a catch-all description for a garden of formal layout.<sup>26</sup> Rathfarnham Castle, because of its salubrious air and proximity to the city, attracted many visitors. In one contemporary description it was referred to as ‘the visiting place of the Vice-regal Court of Ireland’, and so Leggett’s work there must have introduced his skills to many potential clients.<sup>27</sup>

The second place mentioned by Leggett in his 1790 advertisement was Temple Hill, the seaside villa near Dublin of the Lord Chief Justice, John Scott, 1st Viscount Clonmell.<sup>28</sup> Limited in size at just thirty acres, it was laid out with the conventional elements of a larger landscape park showing Leggett’s capability in the design of a small as well as a large demesne. The interior was diversified with ‘profusely planted trees and shrubs of every description’, with winding walks and carriage drives as well as a walled kitchen garden with an array of eleven hothouses, discreetly located in a corner of the plot.<sup>29</sup> In 1790, Clonmell gave a garden party to display the demesne’s improvements.<sup>30</sup>

7 – Rathfarnham Castle, watercolour by George Holmes, 1794

*A mountain stream was dammed and widened as it passed through the plateau on which the castle stood, its water having been conducted around a small islet marked by a mature and semi-mature tree, a device already seen at Wynstay where Leggett had worked c.1771. (courtesy Rathfarnham Castle)*







It was described in a Dublin newspaper as a splendid and brilliant *fête champêtre*, attended by the Lord Lieutenant and a throng of the nobility and persons of distinction from in and around the city who passed the day ‘in surveying the beauties of the scene which in the evening were enlivened by bands of music placed in different parts of the improvements’. Such a splendid and well-attended occasion must have drawn Leggett’s industry and skill to the attention of a further circle of potential clients.

Leggett’s various advertisements gave forwarding addresses both in Dublin and Galway suggesting his continual journeying between the two cities. The road passed near Charleville Forest, the 1,500-acre demesne of William Bury, later 1st Earl of Charleville. As is suggested by its name, the demesne was already characterised by ancient oak woodland which Bury, even as a young man in his twenties, had established a nursery to augment.<sup>31</sup> He and his wife developed a well-documented enthusiasm for the Gothic as opposed to the Classical style of architecture, and made a substantial contribution to the design of their newly projected Gothic-Revival castle by the noted architect, Francis Johnston (1760-1829) (Plate 8).<sup>32</sup>

Consistent with their interest in the neo-Gothic architectural style was their awareness of the Picturesque landscape, a style that relied on woodland for its principal element rather than pasture, as had been the case with the Brownian landscape. They were familiar with the writings of William Gilpin (1724-1804), the English enthusiast for the Picturesque wooded landscape, as was described in his 1791 book, *Forest scenery, and other woodland views*.<sup>33</sup> It proposed that inspiration for landscape gardeners could be

9 – *Map of Charleville Forest, drawn by J. Bury, 1844*

*Detail of a plan devoted to the River Clodiagh as it passed through the demesne indicates the importance of its riverine landscape, with its serpentine course and many islands. (courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)*

*opposite*

8 – *Charleville Castle, Co Offaly*

*The Wellingtonia (Sequoiadendron giganteum), one of the individual trees around the castle that may have been among those recommended by the great Scottish encyclopedist of gardening, J.C. Loudon, on his professional visit in 1811. (Alamy)*



found in beautiful homeland scenery, it being no longer thought appropriate to draw from ancient Roman examples. Enthusiasts for the Picturesque were encouraged not only to write about it, but also to sketch or paint its epitomes, as Catherine Bury did at Penrhyn Castle and its wooded landscape in North Wales.<sup>34</sup> A part of Leggett's work at Charleville seems to have been along the glen of the rapidly flowing River Clodiagh. An early nineteenth-century plan of the demesne focusing on the river's course shows a pair of treed islets that were a hallmark of Leggett's designs (Plates 1 and 9).<sup>35</sup> Further along the river's course is shown a group of seven more substantial wooded islands, elongated in form so as to minimally interrupt the water's flow. Opposite the castle and its farmyard, the river assumed its broadest width. A holding or retention pond was of use in preventing the flooding of the low-lying farmyard and its adjacent dairy, while a substantial grotto by a weir ornamented one bank. William Gilpin had recommended of any Picturesque glens 'under the hands of improvement' that:

Their beauty consists in their natural wildness; and the best rule is to add little but to be content with removing a few deformities, and obstructions. A good walk, or a path there must be: and the great art will consist in conducting it in the easiest and most natural way to the spot where the cascade, the rock, or any other object which the glen exhibits may be seen to the best advantage. If a seat or two be thought necessary, let them be of the rudest materials, and their situation in no way forced.<sup>36</sup>



10 – THE RIVER CLODIAGH AT CHARLEVILLE FOREST, by William Ashford, 1801

*The theoretician of the Picturesque landscape, William Gilpin, recommended that the beauty of an 'improved' glen consisted in respecting its natural wildness, but did allow that a path might be inserted to lead a visitor to a place where a cascade or a rock might be seen to advantage, as can be seen in the glen of the River Clodiagh at Charleville Forest. (Christies)*

The implementation of Gilpin's ideas at Charleville Forest is illustrated in an 1801 painting by William Ashford showing the river glen with its irregular deviations, its banks shaded by fortuitously growing trees with their undergrowth of various ages, the rapidly flowing water foaming over rocks, and a bridge constructed of the rudest materials (Plate 10). The effect was described in 1801 by Sir Charles Coote:

The Clodiagh river runs with rapidity through the demesne which is well supplied by several mountain streams, and rolls over huge rocks through a deep glen: its banks are laid out in elegant walks, which are thickly planted with deciduous trees, and evergreens, forming a pleasing contrast, and intersected with several rustic bridges, which with the cascades have altogether a most charming effect. A grotto which commands a principal fall, is finished in true rustic style; the tumbling rocks, the hermit's bed, and the well are most happily situated and the incrustations and petrifications which are now throwing out, give it all the venerable appearance of antiquity, and shew the purest taste; when lights are introduced they give the grandest illumination to the reflecting spar and transparent petrifications.<sup>37</sup>



Gilpin was less proscriptive about the character of a wooded glen if it passed in the vicinity of a house:

But though we are averse to load these sweet recesses of nature with false ornaments; yet if such scenes make a part of the immediate environs, or pleasure ground, of a house; a proper degree of ornament will of course be required. The walk must be more artificial-its borders may be spread here and there as in other decorated places, with flowers and flowering shrubs-the seats may be more elegant; and a temple, or other building may find a place; but still the same chaste spirit must regulate here, which presides over all other improvements.<sup>38</sup>

Gilpin's proscription is seen reflected at Charleville in another painting by Ashford (Plate 11).<sup>39</sup> It depicts the river as it passed close to the castle and the farmyard, where its course was straightened and flanked by a well-dressed path; close by, a place was found for a neo-Gothic dairy backed by a castellated yard.<sup>40</sup>

A separate landscape composition, accessed by a tunnel across a public road, and only seen from the upper windows of the castle, was a thirty-acre lake of irregular outline that was dug in an area of marshy ground, the surplus soil being used to form large

*11 – PUNT ON THE RIVER CLODIAGH AT CHARLEVILLE FOREST, by William Ashford, 1801*

*Gilpin allowed that the character of an 'improved' river glen might be less wild when it was passing in proximity to a house and might be ornamented with a well-dressed walk and a temple or other building.  
(private collection)*



wooded islands that concealed the water's bounds from various points of view. Gilpin had written: 'An artificial lake has sometimes a good effect; but neither propriety nor beauty can arise from it unless the extremities of it are perfectly managed and concealed ... You must always suppose it to be part of a larger piece of water.'<sup>41</sup> Having been dug down to a clay bottom that is inimical to vegetation, the lake surface was relatively free of weeds, thus providing almost perfect reflections. Charleville Forest's demesne continued to be admired during the nineteenth century. In 1837, Samuel Lewis wrote:

The demesne of Charleville Forest ... is remarkable for the judicious advantage that has been taken of its natural beauties. It contains about 1500 acres, richly wooded and comprises two artificial lakes, the larger of which is studded with islands. The Clodiagh passes through it along a deep glen, forming several cascades overhung with trees; the largest of the cascades seen to most advantage from an artificial grotto formed for the purpose of giving employment in a season of scarcity.<sup>42</sup>

The Burys, later the Earl and Countess of Charleville, pioneered the use of the neo-Gothic style for castle building in Ireland, but they also pioneered the introduction of the Picturesque style of landscaping. It was probable that his clients' eagerness for the Picturesque induced Leggett to display his dexterity and so produce a more naturalistic style of landscaping not evidenced elsewhere in his work.<sup>43</sup>

Although the later landscape gardener, Hely Dutton, affirmed that Leggett had beautified almost every demesne in county Galway, Leggett only mentions one demesne in western Ireland in his 1790 advertisement and that was in the adjoining county of Mayo. Low-lying and, in part, gently undulating, the 1750-acre estate of Castlemacgarrett House belonging to Dominic Geoffrey Browne (1755-1826) was centred on the slow-moving and meandering river, Robe.<sup>44</sup> Crossed by the five-arched hump back bridge of the entrance drive and punctuated by a series of shallow weirs, the sinuous river described a wide horseshoe bend in front of the house. Backed by continuous perimeter belts of trees, the park's verdant slopes were sprinkled with single trees and descended to the banks of the river on both sides in a conventional Brownian style. Unfortunately, the house around which Leggett had designed the park was reduced to ashes in a fire in 1811, the family subsequently making its residence in a converted stable block.<sup>45</sup> The only view of the park to survive, that by Alexander Lydon of 1880, shows, therefore, but a remnant of Leggett's original design but which is sufficient to indicate the lake-like placidity of the river, its surface reflecting the light of the sky in the way that an artificial lake does in a conventional Brownian design (Plate 12).<sup>46</sup>

The last of the estates specifically noted by Leggett in 1790 was Marlay Park near Dublin. Owned by a member of a prominent Dublin banking family and member of parliament, David La Touche, its straightforward house, modest and unaffected, was set in a park that seems to have been laid out as much for its utility as its beauty. In addition to the usual perimeter woodland screens, further internal screens of trees provided additional shelter, separating different areas of pasture and cultivation. A commitment to the demesne's agricultural productivity is shown by the frequent newspaper advertisements for the sale of its products. Agricultural seed such as that of wheat, oats and barley was



12 – Castlemacgarrett House, county Mayo, by Rev F.O. Morris

*Leggett's extensive practice in the west of Ireland included the parkland at Castlemacgarrett House, county Mayo. After the house around which Leggett had designed the park burned down in 1811, the family established itself in the converted stable block, accounting for the awkward relationship between it and the tranquil River Robe. (lithograph from Rev F.O. Morris, THE PICTURESQUE VIEWS OF SEATS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND, ETC (London, 1864-80))*

raised in the fields and sold.<sup>47</sup> Summer grazing in the pastures for bloodstock was offered at a premium. The precision with which the various plantations were managed was illustrated by one newspaper advertisement:

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION  
by John Davis Auctioneer

In the demesne of Col. Latouche at Marlay, several lots of full-grown Ash, Elm, Sycamore, Larch, Alder and Scotch Fir, Timber of large dimensions, a few pieces of choice Maple, Walnut [*sic*], Cherry Tree, and Chestnut Timber; a number of lots of small timber fit for roofing cabins, paling, ladder poles etc., a large quantity of loppings, fit for pea-stakes and variety of other purposes, laid out in small lots ... To be sold by private contract, to thin the plantation, several thousand healthy Forest Trees, from three to nine foot high, fit for transplanting, consisting of well-furnished Beech, Ash, Oak, Sycamore, Mountain Ash, Larch, etc.<sup>48</sup>

The attention paid to a demesne's utility as well as its elegance was reminiscent of what was known in the early eighteenth century as a *ferme ornée*. William Wilson observed the attention to both aspects in his 1786 account of Marlay: 'This gentleman, not content with introducing among his countrymen an example of the most improved husbandry,





*13, 14 – Marlay Park,  
Co Dublin*

*Leggett, in his design for Marlay Park, drew a number of natural mountain streams together to form a lake near the house.*

*(contemporary photographs by Patrick Comerford)*

*15 – Marlay Park House*

*The house, shown in its parkland setting, was acquired by David La Touche in 1764, and extended by him in 1794. (Alamy)*





*16 – Marlay Park, county Dublin*

*At Marlay, the internal woodland screens were laid out to follow the lines of the mountain streams, their water flowing in a shade that was frequently enlivened by cascades. The cascades were criticised by a later generation of landscape gardeners as being too many in number to be appropriate to their site. (Alamy)*

has given in this delightful spot, a model of what refined taste, with ample means to gratify it, can effect by enriching the beauties of nature.’<sup>49</sup>

The internal woodland screens were laid out to follow the lines of several mountain streams passing through the site, which were drawn together to form a small lake within sight of the house (Plates 13-15). Leggett’s management of the streams by the insertion of falls along their length was admired by Wilson: ‘The farm and pleasure grounds which are highly dressed and richly planted, are agreeably broken by several spacious pieces of water, falling in beautiful succession, and which have been conveyed from the neighbouring streams with great art and at considerable expence.’<sup>50</sup> They drew criticism in print, however, from two later well-known landscape gardeners, Hely Dutton (c.1771-c.1825) and James Fraser (1793-1863). Dutton recommended the removal of two of the falls: ‘If I may venture to hint an improvement at Marly [*sic*], it would be to restore the part of the rivulet next to the house to nature, by taking away two small ill-contrived water-falls and permitting the stream to take its natural course; this would be a fine contrast to the ornamented part of the stream, which, at present, though very elegant, has rather too much sameness.’<sup>51</sup> Fraser also singled out the number of Leggett’s cascades: ‘By many, the cascades are considered too numerous, causing in some places a greater





17 – Marlay Park, county Dublin, sketched by Ann La Touche, 1837

*One mountain stream at Marlay Park was not drawn together with the other streams but left to form a diminutive landscape in its own right, crossed by an appropriately modest wooden footbridge.  
(courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)*

degree of placidity than is consistent with the character of the stream.<sup>52</sup>

The design of the individual rocky cascades followed those already familiar in England, such as at Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, and Bowood Park, Wiltshire, the former planned by Capability Brown.<sup>53</sup> They were conceived in imitation or approximation of a natural cascade, the apparently random distribution of the rocks causing a pleasant variety not only in the incidence of a fall's white foam but also in the sound of its falling water (Plate 16). It seems not all of the demesne's mountain streams were drawn together to flow into the lake. At least one rather modest example was left, it seems, to pass unaugmented on its way, forming a diminutive landscape in its own right (Plate 17).

Leggett concluded his list of five major commissions in his 1790 advertisement with an indication that he had further projects in hand. Of these, two are known from contemporary or near contemporary references. One was at Stillorgan Park, near Dublin, which had been laid out in the early eighteenth century as an elaborate but formal landscape park.<sup>54</sup> Leggett was tasked with breaking its strict geometry, introducing a new three-mile-long winding approach to exploit the demesne's distant views of sea and mountain.<sup>55</sup>

Already in 1784, three years after his arrival in Ireland, Leggett was using Newtown Bellew, county Galway, as a corresponding address, and would continue to use it or its adjoining villages as a corresponding address until 1790.<sup>56</sup> His employment there





18 – *Mount Bellew House, county Galway*

*Mount Bellew House and demesne was part of a larger scheme of rural improvement, centred around the lake designed by Leggett but only completed after his death.*

*(engraving from J.P. Neale, VIEWS OF SEATS OF NOBLEMEN, ETC (London, 1820)) (courtesy Mount Rivers Collection)*

was as part of a scheme of rural improvement that extended beyond the Mount Bellew demesne, which had been inaugurated by its owner, Christopher Dillon Bellew (1763-1826). The house was depicted among the *Views of the seats of the noblemen and gentlemen of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland*, published by the English architectural and landscape draughtsman, J.P. Neale, between 1824 and 1829, with an explanatory text in which Leggett's involvement was confirmed (Plate 18).<sup>57</sup> The demesne extended on both sides of the Galway to Roscommon road, with selected openings in the plantations to allow passers-by to enjoy views of the house and its dressed grounds (Plate 19). The road crossed over the River Shiven by a newly built five-arched bridge which acted as an ornament in the landscape, as did the tower of a newly built church which was reflected in an arm of the lake. A small ruined chapel was retained as an eye-catcher on one of the lake's many promontories. A new town centre was laid out in a polygonal form. Neale described a number of these improvements:

The House stands on a gentle swell ... between it and the road, runs the Shivan [*sic*], spreading to a considerable expanse as it proceeds eastward; the varied outline it then assumes, its wooded islands, and lucid waters bathing the opposite acclivity, form together a scene of no ordinary interest and beauty. The Demesne extends by sunk fences across the road, which divides it almost into equal parts: that on the north side displaying grounds tastefully laid out, plantations sweetly



*19 – Mount Bellew House, county Galway*

*The house in its parkland setting showing the c.1817 extensions proposed by Sir Richard Morrison and Dominick Madden as they appeared in the early twentieth century before the house was demolished. (Galway County Heritage Office)*

grouped, or thickening into masses, over which the eye passes to a blue mountain in the distant horizon. As the river advances, it spreads to an extensive lake; showing to the traveller, by openings judiciously made, the mansion on his right, with its scenery in parts descending to the water's edge; while on his left, he is forcibly struck with the church, its tower, and pinnacles, with all the distinctness of reality, presented on its bosom. Winding from hence, or a little more easterly, it takes a direction to the south, and is lost in a deep wooded glen after passing a bridge of many arches...<sup>58</sup>

The renowned German connoisseur of landscape gardening, Prince Puckler von Muskau, writing in 1828, considered the lake to be a model of its kind:

The park at Mount B[ellew] affords a perfect study for the judicious distribution of masses of water, to which it is so difficult to give the character of grandeur and simplicity that ought always to belong to them. It is necessary to study the forms of nature for the details; but the principal thing is never to suffer an expanse of water to be completely overlooked, or seen in its whole extent. It should break on the eye gradually, and if possible lose itself at several points at the same time, in order to give full play to the fancy – the true art in all landscape gardening.<sup>59</sup>

The lake was not quite finished on Leggett's death after which the project was continued, not always successfully, under the supervision of Hely Dutton.<sup>60</sup>

It was perhaps because of a lengthy absence from Dublin that Leggett, on his return to the capital in 1798, discovered a rumour in circulation that he had died. He felt obliged to insert a notice in the *Dublin Evening Post* refuting it and claiming he was in perfect health, and he went on to advertise that he had devised a new way of forcing fruit.<sup>61</sup> But there may have been some truth in rumours of ill-health, for in 1802 Hely Dutton referred to him as ‘the late Mr. Leggett’.<sup>62</sup> During his lifetime, Leggett’s reputation was well known. The Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry, when considering the landscaping around his new house at Downhill, county Londonderry, wrote of him, not necessarily admiringly, as among ‘the common manufacturers of lawns and plantations’.<sup>63</sup> By 1790 his reputation was sufficient for Denis McClair (1762-1840), known as Mikler Dionysy in Poland and Ukraine, declared that he had learned his profession in Ireland ‘under the famous Legat’. McClair would become the principal professional landscape gardener in Poland and further afield.<sup>64</sup> James Fraser later described him as ‘a landscape gardener of original talent’.<sup>65</sup> Dutton referred to him as ‘a very celebrated landscape gardener when he was attempting to raise funds for a gravestone over his burial in the Forthill cemetery in Galway city’:

Mr Thomas Leggett, a very celebrated landscape gardener, who after beautifying almost every demesne in the county, is most ungratefully suffered to lie here neglected, without even a Hic Jacet. I proposed some years since, to receive subscriptions to enable me to raise an humble monument to his memory, but, alas! I felt a freezing indifference, except from one gentleman, who would give 20 guineas, provided it was erected in his own demesne.<sup>66</sup>

He paid tribute to the work Leggett and a colleague had carried out in county Galway: ‘Planting has long been a favorite [*sic*] pursuit in this county especially since the days of Shanley and Leggett, who certainly gave a considerable impulse to it.’<sup>67</sup> Dutton, however, had already distanced himself publicly from Leggett’s landscaping style, writing in 1819: ‘My pretensions to the title of landscape gardener are based on foundations materially different from Shanley, Leggatt or any other deceased professor, except the late Mr. Roach.’<sup>68</sup>

Just as in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Ireland, many prestigious architectural commissions were given to architects who had settled from abroad, such as Richard Castle (d.1751) and James Gandon (1742-1823); commissions were given to landscape gardeners like Leggett who had similarly settled. Leggett designed in a style that was much influenced by that of Capability Brown, which involved enclosing a demesne with woodland plantations, surrounding a house with open pasture sprinkled sparsely with individual or small clumps of trees and ornamented with a sheet of water and carriage drives, both in a mainly serpentine form. He was sufficiently versatile, however, to respond to a client who wished a design in a later Picturesque style which comprised more woodland than pasture as at Charleville Forest. His commissions were set in Ireland’s level or undulating lowlands rather than in the mountainous, coastal or lakeshore regions admired by later proponents of the Picturesque landscaping style. Not having any prominent natural features, these sites relied mainly for their attractions on what the talents of a landscape gardener such as Leggett could provide.



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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Keith Goodway, 'William Emes (1729/30-1803) landscape designer and gardener', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2008), online (17th Jan 2023).
- <sup>2</sup> Marion Mako, *The gardens at Eaton Hall* (Eaton, 2009) 14.
- <sup>3</sup> Leggett's surname was later spelled variously as 'Leggatt', and even 'Legat'.
- <sup>4</sup> Cookson and Tickner, *The mile walk: Attingham, a report commissioned by the National Trust* (2015).
- <sup>5</sup> Humphrey Repton, 'The Attingham Park Red Book' (MS at National Trust, Attingham Park).
- <sup>6</sup> Chester Courant, 29th May 1770.
- <sup>7</sup> Fiona Cowell, *Richard Woods (1715-1793): master of the pleasure garden* (Woodbridge, 2019) 241.
- <sup>8</sup> *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 2nd June 1775.
- <sup>9</sup> P. Stamper, *Historic parks and gardens of Shropshire* (Shrewsbury, 1996) 62.
- <sup>10</sup> *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 18th Jan 1781.
- <sup>11</sup> Cowell, *Richard Woods*, 3.
- <sup>12</sup> For the careers of all three see the *Dictionary of Irish Architects*, www.dia.ie.
- <sup>13</sup> Samuel Hayes, *A practical treatise on planting and the management of woods and coppices* (Dublin, 1794) 166.
- <sup>14</sup> *Saunders's Newsletter*, 8th Nov 1784,
- <sup>15</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 25th May 1784.
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 21st Dec 1790.
- <sup>17</sup> It has been contended that Stuart's work was not commissioned by Henry Loftus, 1st Earl of Ely, but by the castle's then owner, William Conolly. See Kerry Bristol, 'Rathfarnham Castle in the architectural oeuvre of James 'Athenian' Stuart: a question of patronage', in Michael McCarthy (ed.), *Lord Charlemont and his circle* (Dublin, 2001) 119.
- <sup>18</sup> It was said to have cost £1,500; *Dublin Evening Post*, 16th Jan 1790.
- <sup>19</sup> Giuseppe Vasi, *Della magnificenze di Roma antica e moderna* (Roma, 1747-1761).
- <sup>20</sup> Ordnance Survey Ireland, Co Dublin, First edition, six-inch map. 1835-42. Having been neglected for some time, the temple was demolished in the 1960s, its peripheral columns being re-erected as a folly in the garden of Ballymaglassan House, county Meath.
- <sup>21</sup> See Vasi, *Della magnificenze di Roma; Andrea Palladio, Quattro Libri* (Rome, 1570) 66.
- <sup>22</sup> The gateway is presently well maintained in the middle of a traffic island by Dublin County Council.
- <sup>23</sup> Cookson and Ticknor, *The mile walk: Attingham*. The most outstanding example was the involvement of the landscape gardener Peter Shanley in the design of the prodigious range of greenhouses at Bellevue, county Wicklow. See John Ferrar, *A view of ancient and modern Dublin, with its improvements to the year 1796* (Dublin, 1796) 105.
- <sup>24</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 6th March 1798.
- <sup>25</sup> Joseph Archer, *Statistical survey of the county of Dublin* (Dublin, 1801) 101.
- <sup>26</sup> James Fraser, 'On the present state of gardening in Ireland etc', J.C. Loudon, *The Gardener's Magazine* (London, 1826) I, no. 10. Other garden buildings included a pheasantry and a menagerie. See respectively *Dublin Evening Post*, 7th Jan 1806 and *Saunders's Newsletter*, 7th Mar 1783.
- <sup>27</sup> *Porcupine*, 26th August 1801
- <sup>28</sup> The demesne wall was said to have cost £2,000-£3,000, part of the enclosure being used as a deer park. See Ferrar, *A view of ancient and modern Dublin*, 79.
- <sup>29</sup> *Saunders's Newsletter*, 27th May 1799, 31st Mar 1806.
- <sup>30</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 19th June 1797.
- <sup>31</sup> An advertisement in 1836 for the sale of 2,300 'Prime Oak', and 300 'Prime Ash' at Charleville Forest confirm the predominance of oak and, to a lesser extent, ash as constituents in the plantations there. *Saunders's Newsletter*, 3rd Mar 1836.
- <sup>32</sup> Finola O'Kane, *Ireland and the picturesque* (New Haven and London, 2013) 174-83.
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 174; William Gilpin, *Remarks on forests scenery and other woodland views (relative chiefly to picturesque beauty) in 3 parts* (London, 1791) I, 197.
- <sup>34</sup> O'Kane, *Ireland and the Picturesque*, 179.
- <sup>35</sup> The J. Bury who signed the drawing may be Hon. John Bury, the grandson of the makers of the demesne and brother of the amateur artist, Lady Beaujolais Bury.
- <sup>36</sup> Gilpin, *Remarks*, 199
- <sup>37</sup> Charles Coote, *General view of the agriculture*

- and manufactures of the King's county* (Dublin, 1801) 180.
- <sup>38</sup> Gilpin, *Remarks*, 200.
- <sup>39</sup> Cowell, *Richard Woods*, 3.
- <sup>40</sup> Ornamental dairies were contrived to encourage the ladies of the house to indulge in the productive yet pleasurable activity of skimming, churning and butter-making with the milk of an estate's choice dairy herd.
- <sup>41</sup> Gilpin, *Remarks*, 187.
- <sup>42</sup> Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland*, 2 vols (London, 1837) II, 652.
- <sup>43</sup> The great Scottish encyclopaedist of gardening, J.C. Loudon, proposed additional planting in 1811 in the form of an arboretum. See J.C. Loudon, *Arboretum et fruticetum Britannicum*, 8 vols (London, 1838) I, 113,129.
- <sup>44</sup> The spelling of the demesne changed over time. Although Leggett refers to it as Castle Mount Garrett in his 1790 advertisement, it is, and has been, generally referred to as Castlemacgarrett. Leggett refers to its owner as Dominic Gef Brown an abbreviated form of Dominick Geoffrey Browne. His son Dominick Browne was created 1st Baron Oranmore and Browne in 1836.
- <sup>45</sup> *Saunders's Newsletter*, 23rd Aug 1811.
- <sup>46</sup> Rev F.O. Morris, *The Picturesque views of seats of Great Britain and Ireland*, 6 vols (London, 1864-80), V, IV.
- <sup>47</sup> See for example, *Saunders's Newsletter*, 19th Oct 1783.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 20th Feb 1806.
- <sup>49</sup> William Wilson *Post Chaise Companion ... through Ireland* (Dublin, 1786) 411.
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> Hely Dutton, *Observations on Mr. Archer's statistical survey of the county of Dublin* (Dublin, 1802) 123.
- <sup>52</sup> James Fraser, 'On the present state of gardening in Ireland...', in Loudon, *The Gardener's Magazine...* (London, 1826) I 262.
- <sup>53</sup> Dorothy Stroud, *Capability Brown* (London, 1975) 92.
- <sup>54</sup> Dutton, *Observations*, 124.
- <sup>55</sup> *Saunders's Newsletter*, 28th Jun 1802.
- <sup>56</sup> His residences may not have been entirely due to his work at Mount Bellew as he may also have used them as a base for his other considerable work in the county. See Hely Dutton, *A statistical and agricultural survey of the county of Galway* (Dublin, 1824) 321.
- <sup>57</sup> There were 732 plates in all.
- <sup>58</sup> J.P. Neale, *Views of the seats of noblemen and gentlemen in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1823) V, III.
- <sup>59</sup> James Fraser, *Guide through Ireland* (Dublin, 1838) 208; Hermann, Fürst von Puckler-Muskau, *Travels in England, Ireland and France* (London, 1832), 18th Sept.
- <sup>60</sup> National Library of Ireland, Bellew of Mount Bellew Papers, MSS 27,195, 27,197, correspondence between Christopher Dillon and Olivia Bellew with Hely Dutton, 1812-25.
- <sup>61</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 6th Mar 1798. Francis Madden began his career as a nurseryman on the Lawrence estate of Bellevue, county Galway, and continued as an independent nurseryman there. His descendants operate a nursery to this day but in a different location, nearer Galway city.
- <sup>62</sup> Dutton, *Observations*, 124.
- <sup>63</sup> Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, MS D623/A/44/218, Earl of Bristol to Earl of Abercorn, 6th Jan 1783.
- <sup>64</sup> Patrick Bowe, 'The Polish and Ukrainian gardens of Denis McClair (1762-1853)', *Irish Arts Review* (Dublin, 2002) 176.
- <sup>65</sup> Fraser, 'On the present state of gardening in Ireland', 262.
- <sup>66</sup> Dutton, *Statistical and agricultural survey*, 321.
- <sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 434.
- <sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, 124; *Irish Farmer's Journal and Weekly Intelligencer*, 22nd Oct 1819.