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Searching the archives for botanists, with some Irish case histories

E. Charles Nelson

I am . . . fully convinced that unless we quote original and authentic manuscripts for the proof of Irish history, our arguments are baseless, and we leave the history of Ireland the same muddy thing which it has always been justly styled.¹

That axiom, penned in 1833 by the young Irish topographer, John O’Donovan, is still paramount: original and authentic manuscripts are invaluable sources of facts for historians of every discipline. As far as the history of botany is concerned, the American historian of natural history, Joseph Ewan, commented that “. . . the search for letters, portraits and personalia of botanical interest will always be the persuasion of the few . . . who find in this pursuit high excitement, and accept the sifting of thousands of items to find the pieces of value.”² There is tedium and inevitable disappointment in such research, but it is fascinating, and persistence will be rewarded. Occasionally serendipity will even make the pursuit and searching of archives an exciting occupation.³

PART I

General Remarks

This paper is primarily intended to guide biohistorians seeking information about botanists who worked in Ireland, yet as men and women of Irish birth have contributed to botanical studies in every continent, I hope this essay may prove of value in research work on botanists who laboured elsewhere.

No single archive of Irish botany, let alone Irish natural history, exists, but there are numer-}

merous sources of biographical materials which biohistorians can exploit. It is worth remembering, moreover, that given the intricate interweaving of the histories of the peoples of Ireland and Britain—the so-called British Isles—archival materials for Irish botany are not infrequently found in institutes in Great Britain, and thus familiarity with British sources is important. Robert Lloyd Praeger alluded to this circumstance in his seminal, yet often flawed Some Irish naturalists: a biographical note-book, noting that many of the botanists and zoologists who toiled in Ireland over the centuries were not born on the island, and contrariwise numerous native-born naturalists worked overseas; their reliquiae must be sought in their native and their adopted lands. It is important, therefore, to become familiar with the bibliographies, guidebooks and catalogues that contain the basic information about Irish and British archives and their contents.

Botanical historians working within Ireland and Great Britain are fortunate in having Desmond’s Dictionary of British and Irish botanists and horticulturists as a source book.⁴ A revised and augmented edition is about to be published which will include many new Irish entries. This dictionary, in its various editions, is a mine of valuable information but requires careful handling and, like all such works, it should not be regarded as infallible and complete; the quality of the information is only as good as the quoted sources, and when these are imperfect, the dictionary entries will be partial or even inaccurate, repeating others’
imperfections. There are now several other
foreign—in the Irish context—dictionaries of
botanists and naturalists which contain addi-
tional or corrected information about Irish-
born individuals; examples include Botanical
exploration of southern Africa by Gunn and Codd
and the Ewans' thesaurus of Rocky Mountain
naturalists. I also commend Stafleu and Cow-
an's Taxonomic literature (ed. 2); it lists pub-
lications of taxonomic significance in botany,
is alphabetically arranged and includes sub-
stantial information about each author—bio-
ographical sources, the location of collections
and also manuscripts. It is much wider in its
scope than Ireland, but it is invaluable as a
source of information on the foreign contacts
of Ireland's naturalists.

An important source of biographical data is
the Dictionary of national biography and the var-
ious supplements to it which include notices
of many men and women of Irish birth; in
general these will be cross-referenced in Des-
mond's Dictionary. Preliminary work has been
undertaken on a proposed dictionary of Irish
biology by the Royal Irish Academy; if this
project proceeds, it should stimulate substan-
tial research on Irish naturalists. Dictionaries
of biographies for other nations—Australia,
South Africa, and the United States of Amer-
ica, for example—may also provide useful ma-
terial, especially on Irish emigrants who be-
came plant collectors.

A biographical dictionary is only a "key"—
it unlocks doors, suggests avenues of research
and may even lead into proverbial blind alleys.
Moreover, even the best dictionaries provide
only basic, skeletal data; biographers certainly
should consult the printed sources mentioned
therein but must always remember that these
are essentially secondary ones. No one should
compile a biography using solely the printed
materials mentioned in dictionaries like those
noted above, unless a recent biography has
been published by a competent historian fol-
lowing detailed archival research—but then,
surely no one will be repeating another's work
as there is too much still to be done for the
first time. Biographers must go on to research
the primary materials, the original and au-
thetic manuscripts alluded to by John O'Donovan, which include registers of births,
marriages and deaths, the diaries and journals
of their subjects and their associates, their let-
ters and research notes, their collections and
ephemera.

How may these be found? As far as manu-
scripts are concerned, Natural history manu-
script resources in the British Isles by Bridson,
Phillips and Harvey seems to be reasonably
comprehensive for Great Britain, and it may
be used to unearth the manuscripts of Irish
naturalists held in British institutes. However,
it is not exhaustive and clearly there are many
gaps. A simple example will illustrate that: it
was impossible to list all the correspondents
represented in the huge archive of letters re-
ceived by William and Joseph Hooker which
spans more than a century and is deposited in
the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The Hook-
kers' correspondence is a crucial source for any-
one working on Irish botanists, yet it has hard-
ly been tapped by biographers. A partial list
of the correspondents was published early this
century, and there is at Kew a complete (al-
though not perfect) manuscript catalogue. On
the other hand, the correspondence and
manuscripts of Sir Hans Sloane, perhaps one of
the most eminent Irish-born naturalists, are
deposited in the British Library, and there is
a comprehensive published index to this col-
collection. There are other directories of manu-
script sources which can be consulted to sup-
plement the information published by Bridson,
Phillips and Harvey (see below).

As for indigenous Irish repositories, Natural
history manuscript resources in the British Isles is
less satisfactory; that is not the compilers' fault,
for they did not receive replies from some Irish
institutes. Hayes' massive Manuscript sources for
the history of Irish civilization, which covers the
major Irish archives (principally the National Library of Ireland, the Genealogical Office and the Public Record Office [now The National Archives], all in Dublin), should be consulted as it fills some of the lacunae; materials relating to Ireland deposited in overseas archives are also noted. Hayes’ compendium is arranged according to persons, places and dates, as well as subjects. Botany itself has few entries, but under the personal names items of surprising interest may be found. Another important source of basic information is Eager’s *A guide to Irish bibliographic material*, which includes entries on biography.

A guide to archives in Ireland was published in 1988, and a revised edition is due in 1993, and while the entries are brief and do not emphasise natural history, this directory provides ready access to basic information about the manuscript sources available within the island. I have attempted to expand the list of Irish natural-history archives in ‘‘It’s a long way to Tipperary’—finding natural-history archives in Ireland, with an appendix listing archives,” published in Archives of natural history 17 (1990).

I also recommend (with slight reservations) the *Handbook on Irish genealogy*. At first sight this may seem an unworthy recommendation, but it is a valuable guide, produced to aid the “layman,” especially the people searching for their “Irish roots.” For a biohistorian unfamiliar with Irish archives it is undoubtedly the best introduction available, besides containing lots of information. The handbook provides details of how and when to consult archives, lists of some pedigrees published in periodicals and books, and gives a brief précis of the contents of each one of the principal genealogical archives in Ireland (both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland).

Of course most Irish archives have internal catalogues that allow research workers to trace materials—few have printed catalogues and I suspect few ever will publish such works. Comprehensive, unpublished catalogues exist, for example, in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin; the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast; and the Department of Manuscripts, Trinity College, Dublin; as important manuscripts may be extant outside Ireland, the “Search Room Indexes” in the National Register of Archives and the Public Record Office in London should be consulted too.

Most of the botanists, whether amateur or professional, who worked in Ireland in past centuries have bequeathed herbarium specimens—indeed this is equally true for those who had careers outside Ireland. Guides to herbaria—*British and Irish herbaria: an index to the location of herbaria* by Kent and Allen, for example—invariably include materials of value to biohistorians. Kent and Allen list many more botanical collectors (with at least the dates when they were active in the field) than are contained in the 1977 edition of Desmond’s *Dictionary*; Clokie’s catalogue of the Oxford herbaria, Hedge and Lamond’s *Index of collectors in . . . Edinburgh*, and Dandy’s historical guide to the herbaria garnered by Sir Hans Sloane are also invaluable tools.

**PART II**

**Case Histories**

To illustrate a few of the sources, printed and manuscript, that may be mined in the pursuit of bygone Hibernian naturalists, I will briefly note some of the characters that I have researched over the past 17 years.

I began as a novice, without any background as a student of Irish history, but along the years have learned much about where to look for materials. Most of the answers to my biographical questions have been obtained by slowly and painstakingly working through known archives, but, delightfully, other an-
swers have been discovered by accident. Serendipity compensates for tedium and boredom.

**Henry Nicholson** (ca. 1681–ca. 1721) was the first “Professor in Botanie” in the University of Dublin (Trinity College). According to the standard sources, he flourished from 1660 to 1732 and was a student at Trinity College, Dublin, and at the universities in Oxford and Leiden. The lists of their alumni provide his stated age on entry, from which may be calculated his year of birth—on 5 January 1709, entering Leiden, Nicholson gave his age as 26 (year of birth ca. 1683), but on entering Trinity College, Dublin, in 1700 he said he was 19 (year of birth ca. 1681). So far I have been unable to obtain his precise birthday, but he was certainly not “flourishing” in 1660—the Henry Nicholson who was alive then was his grandfather.

When dealing with men and women who lived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is unlikely that problems of dates can be resolved without great good fortune. Many Irish civil records and parochial documents (principally those of the [Anglican] Church of Ireland) were destroyed during the Civil War in 1622 when the Four Courts building, housing the Treasury of the Public Record Office, in Dublin, was burnt to the ground—the Public Record Office (now retitled The National Archives) was re-established and has an excellent range of material, but many crucial early archives were totally lost.

Dr. Nicholson’s letters to the English botanist James Petiver have survived in the Sloane archive, now in the British Library, London. Sir Hans Sloane was a native of the north of Ireland, and thus his letters contain a considerable quantity of information about Ireland in the late 1600s and early 1700s—for example, the correspondence from Sir Arthur Rawdon of Moira, and his friend William Sherard.

Valuable information about Nicholson was found in two other places. In the Registry of Deeds, Kings Inns, Dublin, there are records of property transactions—some these sometimes take the form of marriage settlements and wills. There is an internal catalogue listing the deeds arranged county by county according to the name of the vendor or original owner. Henry Nicholson’s marriage settlement deed, dated 17 July 1711, is recorded in the Registry and states that he married Sarah Baldwin and that her father paid a dowry of £2,000. The couple was married on 3 August 1711, according to an entry in the published records of the parish of St. Peter and St. Kevin, Dublin. There are several other deeds under Nicholson’s name in the Registry of Deeds.

The second source is the Department of Manuscripts in Trinity College, Dublin, which contains much more than the College’s own muniments and the famous illuminated gospel book, the “Book of Kells.” The Nicholson family papers are there as well as the archive of Dr. William King, Archbishop of Dublin. The College possesses a letter from Henry Nicholson’s father to the archbishop: Edward Nicholson wrote that “I wish his [Henry’s] engagement might happen to some vertuous [sic] lady of vertuous [sic] parents, among those that are between 15 and 21 years of age. But I leave all to your grace’s direction.”

A printed document in the Nicholson archive, dated 1721, mentioned Dr. Henry Nicholson “deceased” thereby yielding another date, albeit imprecise. Nicholson left Dublin in 1715 to study law at the Middle Temple in London, and in 1716 he was admitted a Fellow of the Royal Society. Thus he died between 1716 and 1721 and not in 1732 as guessed by previous historians.

**Caleb Threlkeld** (1676–1728), a contemporary of Henry Nicholson, was the author
of the first flora of Ireland, published on Thursday 26 October 1726, the day before Jonathan Swift’s biting satire Travels into several remote nations of the world . . . by Lemuel Gulliver . . . 22 Such a detail may seem trivial, but it illuminates the life and times of a subject and places him firmly in contemporary society.

My reason for including Threlkeld here is to caution biohistorians about Robert Lloyd Praeger’s book Some Irish naturalists. 23 Praeger stated that Threlkeld was a doctor of divinity and had a botanic garden, but these were figments of Praeger’s imagination—there is no record that Threlkeld owned a garden or that he received a degree in divinity, although he was a dissenting cleric. Other biographers stated that Caleb Threlkeld received the degree of master of arts from the University of Glasgow, but the university’s records do not confirm this. Indeed, Threlkeld apparently left Glasgow without any qualifications, after perhaps only one year’s study. His only degree was a well-documented doctorate in medicine awarded by the University of Edinburgh in 1713.

In my work on Threlkeld, I found that local newspapers were a valuable source of information, although searching through them is extremely time-consuming. 22 The Dublin papers provided the date of publication of Synopsis stirpium Hiberniarum. While it is necessary to be cautious about eighteenth-century advertisements saying that a volume is “just published,” Threlkeld’s book definitely appeared on 26 October 1726 as advertised because it provoked comments which were published in the newspapers a few days later.

The moral of Threlkeld’s story is that a researcher should be sceptical about published biographical information (see also endnote 42), at least to the extent that it is desirable to check primary sources, such as university rolls, parish registers and even local newspapers. Caution may reveal errors or misinterpretations resulting from inaccurate repetition of poorly documented material. Facts can become mutated into legends, and legends can become facts when mishandled by careless biographers.

John White (ca. 1756–1832) was Surgeon-General of the colony of New South Wales (Australia) from its foundation in January 1788 until December 1794 and author of Journal of a voyage to New South Wales, published in London during 1790, which described the voyage of the first convict fleet and early days of the penal settlement. White took a keen interest in the natural history of the colony, contributing many dried plant specimens to James Edward Smith’s herbarium and also seeds for English gardeners.

Biographical studies of John White either remain silent about his place of birth or follow Flinders Barr who supposed that because White was buried in Worthing, Sussex, that he was born in Sussex. There is no evidence that White was English—no document has yet been discovered which confirms Barr’s theory—but there is a strong family tradition, based on verbal statements recorded in 1896, that he was born in Ireland, near Letterbreen in the county of Fermanagh. 24

Because of the destruction of many Irish parochial registers in 1922, this claim cannot be confirmed beyond doubt, but peripheral facts can be established to support it. Documents in the Registry of Deeds, Dublin, indicate that the White family held land in the Letterbreen area during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These records are discussed elsewhere, 24 and I have concluded that they support the statement made by Mrs. Sarah Dundas at Christmas 1896 that her mother Mrs. Jane Boyd was the sister of Surgeon-General John White. Therefore White joins the roster of Irish-born naturalists who worked overseas—he is not known to
have contributed anything to the knowledge of the botany of his native island.

Other information about Dr. White has been obtained in archives in Britain. He was granted the degree of bachelor of medicine by the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, in 1796 after his return from New South Wales. As well as being a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, White was an honorary member of the Society for Promoting Natural History, the minute books of which record some details of the production of his book. Parochial records for the parish of St. Nicholas, Brighton, reveal that he married for a second time in 1829, when he was aged 72, to a widow, Mrs. Elizabeth Hope—she survived Dr. White and proceeded to marry for a third time! Why John White should have been buried in Worthing is still an unfathomable mystery.

Whereas in Henry Nicholson's case a record of his university career exists providing some dates, Wade's childhood and early adulthood are mysteries—we have no year of birth, and in later life Wade was scrupulous in concealing his age.

Almost the first fact that can be learnt about him is that in 1781 he married Mary Chambers, who was 50 years old. This is recorded in the archives of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), a valuable source of information about some of Ireland's naturalists. As Mary Chambers was 50, I suspect Walter Wade was about the same age, but we simply do not know.

The principal source of information about Wade is in Belfast among the Foster/Masse- reene Papers deposited in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. These papers include the archive of John Foster (later Baron Oriel), the last Speaker of the Irish House of Commons and Dr. Wade's patron. Because Foster was instrumental in promoting the cause of a botanical garden for Dublin, the foundation documents of the Glasnevin Botanic Gardens are preserved in the Foster/Masse- reene Papers; indeed there is no other archive which contains such a complete account of the formation of the Gardens. Thus the Public Record Office in Belfast contains letters from Walter Wade, John Underwood and John White to John Foster which give revealing glimpses into the evolution of the Botanic Gardens from 1790 when it was first proposed and its progress until 1828 when Foster died. It also enlightens us about the lives of all four men—for example, we learn that John White, an under-gardener and author of a treatise on Irish grasses, was a native of County Louth.

Dr. Walter Wade has left a legacy of mystery. Elsewhere I have discussed his stillborn Flora Dubliniensis, a counterpart to William Curtis' Flora Londinensis; two plates, and their accompanying letterpress, reported to have been included in the "Specimen" of this flora.

Walter Wade (d. 1825) was one of the "founding fathers" of the Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin in Dublin, the first professor of botany to the Royal Dublin Society, and thus a significant figure in Irish horticulture and botany at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He lived almost a century after Henry Nicholson, yet we know much less about Wade's family life. His father, John Wade, was an apothecary and chemist who lived in Capel Street, Dublin, and his ancestral lineage can be traced back to the Wades of Clonbraney—the family tree is published in Burke's Landed gentry of Ireland, but that valuable compendium does not provide a date of birth for Walter Wade.

Wade became a surgeon and man-midwife, so he surely studied botany and medicine—one biographer stated that he was a student in Scotland, but none of the Scottish universities has any record of him. His uncle, also christened Walter, studied at the University of Rheims, France, but the younger Walter apparently did not follow in his footsteps.
are still missing. A portrait in oils reputed to show Dr. Wade, and attributed impossibly to Allan Ramsay, did however turn up in a Dublin antique shop in 1985 but vanished again in 1986—fortunately a good photograph of it was obtained, but the doubts about it must remain. Without original documentation, we should be cautious about such objects d'art, and when faced only with secondary sources caution is even more desirable. Some manuscripts (for example, a personal letter containing dates or parochial registers) can be taken at face value, but old photographs of oil paintings that cannot be traced should be questioned.

William Hamilton (ca. 1783–1856), who collected plants in the Caribbean and Mexico and published *Prodromus plantarum Indiae Occidentalis*, has been described as “a perplexing, misunderstood and poorly known individual.” He died aged 73 on 25 May 1856, so an approximate year of birth can be calculated (ca. 1783), but where he was born and who his parents were were not precisely recorded. Hamilton attended the universities of Dublin (1799 to 1805) and Oxford; the registers of the alumni of Dublin and Oxford provide additional information, in particular that his father was the Reverend William Hamilton.

This latter fact was tantalizing. One Reverend William Hamilton was famous for two reasons, as author of a paper on the geology of the Giant’s Causeway, an intriguing formation of octagonal basaltic columns on the north coast of Ireland, and as a murder victim. But it was not possible to link the murdered clerical geologist with the botanist because no parochial registers could be traced giving the younger William’s baptismal records. A chance discovery provided the link. In William Hooker’s correspondence at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, is an obituary notice for the infant son of Hamilton the botanist which contains a series of footnotes; the final one states that the infant’s grandfather was the “Rev. William Hamilton ... who was barbarously murdered by the Irish, in March 1797.”

Dr. William Hamilton can now be set down as the son of the man who wrote about the Giant’s Causeway. University records say he was born in Dublin; he died in Plymouth.

Ninian Niven (1799–1879) was for five years curator of the Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin, resigning in 1838 to devote his time to his nursery and to landscape gardening. He was one of many Scottish horticulturists who came to Ireland to work as gardeners.

I include Ninian Niven to represent a case of a myth perpetuated. Three men with this surname were cited by James Britten and George Boulger in the precursory lists for their biographical dictionary:

1. James (ca. 1774–1827) of Penicuik, plant collector who worked at the Cape of Good Hope;
2. James Craig (1828–1881), curator of Hull Botanic Garden; and

For some unexplained reason, Britten and Boulger stated that the Cape collector was the grandfather of James Craig Niven, the son of Ninian Niven. Thus Ninian is said to have been the son of James Niven of Penicuik, despite a dedicatory notice published in *The Garden* in 1875 which clearly stated a different story.

The editor of *The Garden* recorded that Ninian was born in 1799 at Kelvin Grove, Glasgow, and that his father was a gardener at Keir House, near Perth—there is no mention of his father being a plant collector, and Scottish horticultural records confirm that Ninian Niven senior was gardener at Keir. The biographical notice included a statement that Ninian, when 14 years old, “... developed a taste for the profession of his ancestors, and felt it
incumbent upon him to follow in their footsteps.” 39 That profession clearly was gardening, not plant hunting, although it is apparent that Niven was being schooled by William Hooker as a botanical collector. Such a career never eventuated because Ninian Niven became gardener at Bothwell Castle; “... doubtless, with the sad fate of his old friend and associate, poor [David] Douglas, in his mind, [Niven] has long since reconciled himself to the change that... took place in his destinies.” 39

The registers of the parish of Penicuik40 put a seal on the true story. Therein is recorded the marriage between James Niven (born 28 September 1776, son of the local weaver) and Alison Abernethy (aged 16) on 8 March 1817; the couple had five children but certainly not Ninian. James Niven died on 9 January 1827 and was buried three days later. The melodramatic story that his widow collapsed and died as her husband’s coffin was being carried from the house is absurd nonsense; although Mrs. Alison Niven may have collapsed on that occasion, she did not die until four weeks later and was buried on 8 February 1828, leaving as orphans her four infant daughters and one son.41

David Moore (1808–1879), another Scot, was one of the most important figures in Irish botany in the middle years of the last century, on a par with James Townsend Mackay and William Henry Harvey. Moore’s biography remains to be written, as indeed does that of Mackay; a somewhat unreliable biography42 of Dr. Harvey in the form of a “Life and Letters” was published shortly after his death.

All printed sources cited in Desmond’s Dictionary, and before that by Britten and Bouger, gave the date of David Moore’s birth as 1807, but family papers indicated that it was 1808. The parochial registers of the Scottish parish of Dundee were checked and confirmed that the later date was correct. David, son of Charles Moir (gardener) and Helen Rattray, was born on 23 April 1808.43 Thus published biographical information about a singularly important figure is immediately cast in doubt.

There are oft-repeated statements about David Moore altering his surname when he came to Ireland from Scotland in 1829. For the record, in the Dundee Parish register his surname is spelled Moir, and David later used the form Muir—this occurs on a testimonial written in February 1829 by the minister of Borthwick parish. Yet David was not alone in spelling his surname in a variety of ways, and by about 1832 his father, mother and younger brothers including Charles, who became director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, Australia, were all using the form Moore. The precise reason for this is not stated in contemporary documents, but what is certain is that David Moore did not change the spelling of his name to disguise his Scottish background—an impossible task anyway as he retained a Scottish accent throughout his life.44

David Moore came to Ireland in 1829 and worked at Trinity College Botanic Garden under James Townsend Mackay who was also Scottish. In 1834 Moore was appointed botanist in the Irish Ordnance Survey, succeeding Dr. Thomas Hopkirk, another Scot. Hopkirk was one the founders of Glasgow Botanic Garden yet remains an enigmatic figure about whom not much is known. He was engaged by the Ordnance Survey for two weeks in June 1834, but illness forced him to abandon this position. He took up residence in Belfast and lived there from 1834 until his death on 24 August 1841; during those years Dr. Hopkirk gave lectures and in 1840 was paid 15 shillings a week to arrange the mollusc collection of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society. He became quite well-known to fellow naturalists—William McCalla, who assisted David Moore with work for the Ordnance Survey, named Enteromorpha hopkirkii, a species of marine algae, after him.45
David Moore’s family papers reveal unexpected details about his life—for example, that he had three wives. In 1836, Moore married Hannah Bridgeford, daughter of a Dublin nurseryman; their wedding took place in Dublin. The couple had two daughters, one of whom was named Isabella. Hannah Moore died in 1840, two years after her husband became curator of the Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin. What became of their two girls is largely unknown—Isabella went to Australia and lived for a while with her uncle Charles Moore in Sydney Botanic Garden. In 1843 David Moore married for the second time; his bride was Isabella Morgan, a native of Cookstown in County Tyrone. Moore probably knew her family during his years working for the Ordnance Survey in the north of Ireland. Isabella and David Moore had at least two children, but she died in 1847, a victim of “famine fever” which plagued Ireland during the Great Hunger. Again the fate of the children is not known. David Moore remarried in 1856; his third wife was Margaret Baker, and she survived her husband, living until 1917. Margaret was the mother of Sir Frederick Moore who succeeded to the curatorship of the Glasnevin Botanic Gardens immediately after his father’s death on 9 June 1879.

Little of this information was published in biographical notes about David and Frederick Moore, and it could not have been discovered without consulting the family’s papers. Family documents are the most important sources of information for biographers—such archives should be sought with dogged persistence. Alas many families do not keep old papers, and much has been lost, but some have retained trunk loads of documents, and these are veritable treasure troves for the tenacious sleuth.

Thomas Coulter (1793–1843), explorer of California and eponymous discoverer of the matilija (California tree poppy, Romneya coulteri), was born at Dundalk in County Louth—the printed record of the alumni of the University of Dublin states that he was born in London, an error arising from the misreading of the contraction Lou (i.e., Louth) as Lon. Coulter studied at Trinity College, Dublin, from 1812 until 1820 and then worked in Paris and Geneva. In 1824 he was engaged as a doctor by the Real del Monte Mining Company and travelled to Mexico. Dr. Coulter remained in North America for ten years, during which decade he explored southern California where he collected many new plants including the matilija and big-cone pine (Pinus coulteri).

It has long been said that all the diaries and notebooks recording Coulter’s Mexican and Californian adventures were lost somewhere between London and Dublin after his return to Europe in 1834. But doubt may be cast on this story. In the first place, Dr. Coulter himself never referred to such a recent, devastating loss, but he did comment in one letter that he was labelling his herbarium specimens using his field notes, and Dr. John Scouler studied Coulter’s notes about North American languages. Furthermore, in a letter to William Hooker, William Henry Harvey (Coulter’s successor as curator of the herbarium in Trinity College, Dublin) stated that the diaries were removed from Coulter’s baggage in Mexico because they contained information about the mines. This latter explanation is certainly plausible.

One of Coulter’s American diaries is extant in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington—it was sent there from Dundalk in 1897 by the Coulter family. Rogers McVaugh has published extracts from this, and I have also studied its contents. I venture to suggest that this may have been the only diary Coulter kept—he started it conscientiously, but as time passed the entries became more perfunctory, and long gaps occur. It does not contain botanical or zoological field notes, and there is
nothing in it about the Mexican mines, so perhaps some documents were seized by the Mexican authorities before Thomas Coulter returned home.

My own systematic search for Coulter’s correspondence has been reported elsewhere—they survive in the possession of his collateral descendants and of the de Candolle family, and in institutional archives in Bangor (North Wales), London (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Royal Geographical Society), Geneva (Conservatoire et Jardin Botaniques) and the University of Dublin (Trinity College). A substantial amount of material is also extant in the archives of the Real del Monte Company which remain in Mexico where they were studied by the late Alan Probert. With the assistance of Alan Probert, I have gathered these widely scattered materials together and constructed a comprehensive biography of Dr. Coulter, whom Harvey described as "... a very clever fellow, but rather idle, being sadly addicted to flyfishing. Six feet high with a delightfully rich brogue." That portrait in words encapsulates the man! Two other portraits of him survive—the oil painting in Trinity College, Dublin, which was reproduced in *Huntia* 2, and a beautiful face-mask which I rescued and now own.

**John Aloysius Scallan** (1851–1928), my final example, was a Franciscan missionary in China but his name does not appear in any of the biographical dictionaries that I have mentioned; all the same, it is well-known to gardeners.

Plate 8004 in *Curtis’s botanical magazine*, published in 1905, portrays a yellow-blossomed rose. W. Botting Hemsley named it *Rosa huginis* after Father Hugh Scallan (Pater Hugo) who collected the seeds from which plants were raised at Kew in 1896. All that was recorded about Pater Hugo was his name and the fact that he was based in Shanxi Province. This information came from a letter in the archives of The Natural History Museum (formerly British Museum [Natural History]), London; it was written in elegant Latin by the Reverend Giuseppe Giraldi. Although Giraldi stated that his colleague was English ("Anglus"), Scallan is a distinctively Irish surname, and for a long time I had a nagging suspicion that this missionary was at least of Irish extraction. However, none of the standard works on the history of Chinese botany, including Emil Bretschneider’s monumental *History of European botanical discoveries in China*, noted anyone with that name. As the Jesuits were active in China at the end of the nineteenth century, I contacted the Order’s archivist in Ireland, but no Hugh Scallan was recorded in his sources. However, my enquiry was courteously passed on to Hong Kong, and eventually through the Reverend Harold Naylor, S.J., I received information from the archives of the Franciscans—the Reverend Hugh Scallan, O.S.F., was a native of Rathmines, Dublin.

John Aloysius Scallan, son of Aloysius and Catherine Scallan, was born on 8 September 1851. He was educated in Ireland and France and joined the order in May 1874. On making his profession he took the name Hugh. After teaching for a while in Manchester, England, he went to China as a missionary and lived there until his death on 6 May 1928 at Tongyuan-fang (Sianfu). He suffered many privations during his years in China, and on one occasion was almost killed by a mob.

Father Scallan is known to have made only one small collection of plants in Shanxi Province, including seeds of the rose that was named after him. These reached the British Museum (Natural History), London, through Giraldi, a fellow Franciscan, after whom such plants as *Acer giralldii* are named.

**Conclusion**

Research takes time. It is often frustrating and tedious, it may even cost dearly, and the
information will only be accumulated slowly. Among the skills that must be acquired are the faculty to recognise inconsistencies and inaccuracies in published sources and the expertise to ask the right questions of the right person or institution; by gaining these and exploiting them with craft, a biohistorian will more easily find the "nuggets of gold" that enliven any subject. Of course, serendipity can never be predetermined or aided.

I hope that these case histories will contribute something to help others in their quests for the archives of Irish naturalists. Ewan concluded his paper by noting that as we read and search, save and sort, in pursuit of the histories of our *scientia amabilis*, we should watch for those morsels of commentary that amuse as much as they inform. But amusing morsels can also be misleading, and I conclude with a sentence from one of Harvey's letters to William Hooker; Harvey wrote, in 1835, that David Moore "... is but a young collector, though a very fair botanist having been for many years an assistant at the College Gardens to our friend Mackay—who (entre nous) is his reputed father." Caveat lector!

**General References**

Following is an annotated list of works that may be generally regarded as standard sources particularly for historians of Irish botany; in the main they contain bibliographical materials or are valuable biographical source works with comprehensive bibliographies.


This is regularly reprinted and updated; other similar books are available, but this is the one with which I am personally most familiar. See also items listed by Eager (xii below).


This is not infallible, and there are two valuable works which supplement it:


For other societies see Deane (x below), Hoppen (xvii below); in general see, e.g., R. M. McLeod, J. R. Friday & C. Gregor. 1975. *The corresponding societies of the British Association for the advancement of Science 1883–1929; a survey of historical records*. London, Mansell.


Bridon's introduction gives details of sources which provide further information about manuscripts in Great Britain, including:


The various editions of Burke's *peerage* will provide additional information on noble families.


As Irish-born scholars often went overseas for their university education, directories of the graduates of other universities are especially valuable sources of biographical information; there are *Alumni...*, e.g., for the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and an important source for medical students, who were frequently of botanical significance, is: R. W. Innes Smith. 1932. *English-speaking students of medicine at the University of Leiden*. London.


Portraits are frequently mentioned in biographical dictionaries, but a valuable new compendium (two parts have been published to date), with an important bibliography (Part 1, pp. x–xi) listing other catalogues, is: M. T. Steiber et al. 1987, 1988. *Catalogue of portraits of naturalists, mostly botanists, in the collections of the Hunt Institute, the Linnaean Society of London and the Conservatoire et Jardin Botaniques de la Ville de Genève*. Part 1 *Group portraits*.


x. A. Deane. 1924. Centenary volume 1821–1921; a review of the activities of the society for 100 years with historical notes and memoirs of many distinguished members. Belfast, Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society.


A new edition of this work is in press (January 1993), and works complementing this dictionary which include Irish botanists are the following: J. Ewan & N. D. Ewan. 1981. Biographical dictionary of Rocky Mountain naturalists. Utrecht, Bohn, Scheltema & Holkema.


This includes entries under genealogy, medicine—biography, science—biography, and artists.


There are other guides to finding wills, e.g., A. Vicars (see xxi below); for wills in repositories in Great Britain, see, e.g., J. S. W. Gibson. 1974. Wills and where to find them. Chichester, British Record Society.


For bibliographies of Irish interest, see especially: A. R. Eager (xii above); R. C. Mollan (xx below); E. C. Nelson & E. M. McCracken (xxi below); T. Collins (see xxiii below); and E. C. Nelson. 1989. Three centuries in Irish botanical gardens: an epitome and a bibliography. Long Room 34: 14–38.


It is also important to consult an index to manuscripts in other places, e.g., British Library, 1985–. Index to manuscripts in the British Library. Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey.


Other herbarium catalogues are listed in the comprehensive bibliography to this book, but especially valuable, as far as Irish collectors are concerned, are the following:


Index Herbariorum, Part II Collectors. 1954-. Utrecht, Bohn, Scheltema & Holkema.


Strickland included many minor artists, some of whom had remarkable connections with botany and horticulture. In recent years other accounts of Irish artists have been published, including:


xxv. A. Vicars. 1897. Index to the prerogative wills of Ireland 1536–1810. Dublin. (Also see comments under Eustace [xii above]).


Other biographical dictionaries containing information about Irish men and women are:


In addition to consulting these and A. Eager (xii above), see: R. Slocum. 1967. Biographical dictionaries and related works: an international bibliography of collective biographies . . . (and 1972. Supplement . . . ) Detroit, Gale Research Co.

Notes


3. Other general works dealing with the quest are:


A useful general bibliographic guide is:


4. See General References no. xi.

5. M. Gunn & L. E. Codd. (See General References no. xi.)

6. J. Ewan & N. D. Ewan. (See General References no. xi.)


8. Work on assessing the preliminary lists of possible candidates for the dictionary of Irish biography began in 1987. Further details can be obtained from the Editorial Secretary, Dictionary of Irish Biography, Royal Irish Academy, 19 Dawson Street, Dublin 2. It is propitious that the general editor, Prof. Gordon L. Harries Davies, is a practising historian of the natural sciences.


For information on libraries that contain archives, attention may also be drawn to: [L. Shields, ed.] 1987. A directory of government libraries in the Republic of Ireland. Dublin, Library Association of Ireland.


12. See General References no. xix.

13. Catalogues of collectors represented in Irish herbaria (DBN, TCD) have been published and work on others is in progress. See, for example:


D. A. Webb. 1991. The herbarium of Trinity Col-
14. R. G. C. Desmond. (See General References no xi.)
15. G. D. Burtchaell & T. V. Sadleir. (See General References no. vi.)
   R. W. Innes Smith. (See General References no. vi.)
   Several other Irish parochial registers have been published, but most remain unpublished and many have been lost or destroyed—see the list of extant registers in *Handbook on Irish genealogy*. (See General References no. i.)
23. See General References no. xxii.
25. The manuscript minute books are in the Linnean Society, London.
26. Walter Wade, uncle of the Dublin botanist, published *Carta a hum amigo sobre a estado actual da inoculacao das hexigas . . . Lisboa, 1768*. (I am grateful to R. J. Wolfe, Francis Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, for information about this extremely rare book.)
27. E. C. Nelson & E. M. McCracken. 1987. (General References no. xxi.)
28. E. C. Nelson & E. M. McCracken. (General References no. xxi.)
29. E. C. Nelson. 1980. (See note 27 above.)
32. G. D. Burtchaell & T. V. Sadleir (General References no. vi); J. Foster. 1888. (Note 15 above.)
33. G. L. Herries Davies. (General References no. viii.)
34. There are many letters from Dr. W. Hamilton to W. J. Hooker in the Archives, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; the printed memorial was issued at Plymstock (near Plymouth, Devon) on 12 August 1824.
   Therein the authors stated that James Niven (South African collector) was the grandfather of James Craig Niven, who was the son of Ninian Niven of Glasnevin; while Ninian was father of James Craig, they were not directly related to James Niven of Penicuik.
40. I am indebted to Jennifer Lamond Woods, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, for searching the registers for me.
41. The story originally was printed by: J. M. 1827. Obituary [of James Niven]. *Gard. Mag. & Reg. Rural Domest. Improv.* 2: 255—“His wife died at the instant her husband's corpse left the door of the house, leaving five orphans!”


Gilbert has reproduced a photograph, hitherto unknown, showing Isabella Moore, David Moore’s daughter.

47. As well as archival works already mentioned, see: J. S. Batts. 1976. *British manuscript diaries of the 19th century; an annotated guide.* Arundel, Centaur Press.

48. I am grateful to Anthony P. Grant (University of Bradford) for drawing to my notice John Scouler’s 1840 paper (Observations on the indigenous tribes of the N. W. Coast of America. *J. Roy. Geogr. Soc.* 11: 215–251) in which Scouler incorporated a “list of words from the Indians . . . furnished to me by my friend Dr. Coulter . . .”; this list must have survived any theft or loss of Coulter’s papers. For a fuller account of Coulter’s previously unrecognized pioneering work on Indian vocabularies in California, see: A. P. Grant. In press. The vocabularies of Scouler, Tolmie and Coulter: a reappraisal (a paper read at the Hikan-Pemutian Workshop, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, 26–27 June 1992).


50. At the time of completing this paper (January 1993), the biography had been completed but no publication date is available.


54. Reverend J. McLaughlin, archivist of the Franciscan Order in England, has taken a considerable interest in Father Scallan, and to him I am indebted for much help.


55. J. Ewan. 1970. P. 830. (See note 2 above.)


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