

associated with an attempt by lords to tighten their grip on villein tenants, Bailey is in fact inclined not to characterise serfdom as essentially malign and therefore unlikely to generate the kind of resistance that would lead to its own destruction.

Detailed investigation of English medieval serfdom and its decline has often been the work, from one generation to the next, of no more than a small but industrious corps of historians. Bailey's analysis of a body of material has been conducted at a time when perhaps fewer still are directing their attention to issues of serfdom and the transition from feudalism to capitalism. By showing how detailed investigation of serfdom and its changing incidence can be conducted across a considerable corpus of material, by establishing a template for further research and by setting out central research questions, we can but hope that this work will encourage a new generation of researchers to test these and related issues.

Phillipp R. Schofield
Aberystwyth University

doi:[10.1017/S0956793315000205](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956793315000205)

Nigel Everett, *The Woods of Ireland: A History, 700–1800*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2014. 313 pp. £29.95. 9781846825057.

In this thoroughly researched and thought provoking book, Nigel Everett provides a rich and penetrating analysis of the complicated and often controversial history of Irish woods from 700 to 1800. He transforms our understanding of the political and practical implications of the woods and how these changed over the 1,200 years he covers. Yet he also brings out continuities in attitudes to trees and woods, and their everyday economic importance. He opens the book by considering the historiography of Irish woodland history and successfully critiques Eileen McCracken's *The Irish Woods since Tudor Times* (1971) and Eion Neeson's *A History of Irish Forestry* (1991) which over emphasise the extent of woodland in the medieval period and the level of destruction of woods in the early modern period. He instead stresses the much earlier clearance of woodland, as is now accepted for Welsh, Scottish and English woodland history, and the consequent effort to establish new areas of woodland particularly after 1600.

The great strength of this book is the way evidence and ideas concerning trees and woodland are brought together from diverse sources, including political tracts, literary works, estate papers, topographical drawings and paintings, letters and correspondence, legislation and military memoirs, to produce a convincing and very welcome reinterpretation of Irish woodland history. The very careful selection of instances and examples allows Nigel Everett deftly to throw shafts of light and understanding into the way woods were experienced and valued. He brings out very well, for example, the importance of woods in providing military cover throughout the medieval and modern periods. During the Nine Years War, for instance, Captain Atherton reported in 1599 that they 'had gained a wood' and 'thought little of it' but it became 'the greatest strength we had'

(p. 59). Trees were often felled and undergrowth plashed to impede the movements of an enemy.

Plantations of trees were an essential part of the planters' kit. In 1552 Thomas Cusacke told the Duke of Northumberland that Dufferin in County Down was 'full of woods, water and good land for Englishmen to inhabit' and another commentator celebrated the removal of the 'wolf and the woodkerne' following 'profitable improvement' (p. 54). As in much of Europe, many authors were concerned in the seventeenth century about wood shortages and Everett makes good use of estate descriptions and accounts to examine the context for this worry. Woods could be very profitable and some owners such as Thomas Wentworth, first Earl of Strafford, managed their coppice woods and plantations carefully for the production of cask staves. In 1637 he purchased ten thousand acres at Shillelagh and built a hunting lodge with a park for 500 deer. There were also goshawks and rare pine martens. Here he could play Robin Hood in the mountains and woods, but the local midges were 'younger Brothers to the Muskitoes the *Indies* brag on so much' (p. 127). The production of Irish oak staves declined as the import of American high quality oak staves made from *Quercus alba* increased later in the seventeenth century. Acts encouraging the planting and preserving of timber were introduced in 1698 and modified in 1705 and 1710. These encouraged freeholders and larger tenants to plant specified numbers of trees, the species called for here included oak, fir, elm, ash, walnut, poplars and alder. Plantings were to be protected by fences, walls or hedges. The number successfully established is not known but such plantings were seen as important 'badges' of improvement. Later Acts of 1710 and 1715 encouraged the planting of trees taken from nurseries rather than from established woods and attempted to reduce traditional uses such as the cutting of hazel and withies by 'poor people'.

The significant conflict between the traditional activities of local people, including the extensive grazing of woods, the cutting of hazel for building huts and ash for tools and weapons, and the zeal of landowners for improvement of their estates and protection of their woods runs deeply throughout the history of Irish woodlands. In the mid eighteenth century the fourth Viscount Kenmare was horrified to discover that the rangers he employed to protect his woods 'consumed and destroyed my woods at their pleasure' by grazing their own and other people's stock in them (p. 237). Violence could easily flare up and in 1758 an owner was found guilty of manslaughter after telling the authorities that he had shot a 'man named Barrett gathering nuts in the Wood of Dora' (p. 237).

This engrossing and stimulating book is a major contribution to Irish and woodland history. It is very well produced and has some notably fine illustrations. My only regret is that greater use is not made of maps or of the woods themselves in the form of ecological evidence. But it is likely that more use will be made of these sources in Nigel Everett's forthcoming book on Irish woodlands from 1800 to the present. This important book should be purchased by all with an interest in the history of woods and forests and in the social and political history of Ireland.

Charles Watkins
University of Nottingham