

Charlotte Grace O'Brien (1845-1909), her botanical interests and achievements

Sylvia C.P. Reynolds

Monkstown, Co. Dublin, Ireland

Corresponding author: sylviacpreynolds@icloud.com

This pdf constitutes the Version of Record published on 7 March 2025.

Abstract

Charlotte Grace O'Brien, whose father William Smith O'Brien was the parliamentarian and revolutionary, was best known for her campaigning work to improve conditions for emigrants from Ireland to America in the first half of the 1880s. Apart from her political writings, her poems, essays and a novel were also published. A Memoir of her life was written in the year she died (1909), but little was known about her considerable contribution to Irish botany, including many of her plant records accepted by Robert Lloyd Praeger. She always had a great love and knowledge of the countryside and its wildlife. For several years towards the end of her life, she collaborated with professional botanist Matilda Knowles doing fieldwork in the north-west of Co. Limerick, collecting numerous plant specimens (now in the National Herbarium at the National Botanic Gardens in Dublin) and resulting in their publication 'The Flora of the Barony of Shanid' in 1907. Miss O'Brien's botanical achievements and legacy are discussed along with relevant work, mainly by relatives.

Keywords: Limerick botany; Limerick Field Club; Matilda Knowles; Robert Lloyd Praeger; National Herbarium Dublin (**DBN**).

Introduction

Charlotte Grace O'Brien, the author's great-granddaughter, was born on 23 November 1845, the first year of the Great Famine in Ireland after the failure of potato crops. Her father William Smith O'Brien was a Member of Parliament for Limerick at the time and an ardent nationalist. He led an unsuccessful rising near Ballingarry in Co. Tipperary in 1848, for which he spent time in two Irish prisons before being transported to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), and then fully pardoned in 1856 (Davis, 1998). Towards the end of his life, a teenage Charlotte accompanied her father on some of his travels and she was with him in Wales at the time of his death in 1864.

The subject of a forthcoming biography by Dr Jennifer Redmond, Charlotte was best known for her public campaigning work to improve the conditions for Irish emigrants, particularly young women going to America in the first half of the 1880s. She founded the O'Brien Emigrants Home, a short-stay lodging house near the port in Queenstown (now Cobh) in Co. Cork and also a hostel in New York for use on the emigrants' arrival. She travelled steerage to check accommodation on the ships, also

checking opportunities for Irish emigrants in America. In 2015, she was honoured posthumously by Limerick City and County Council in recognition of her 'pioneering work and altruism protecting the welfare of young Irish girls emigrating to 19th Century America'.

Becoming increasingly deaf and worn out by her campaigning, Charlotte retired from that work in the mid-1880s and spent more time at Ardanoir, the home she had built at Foynes by the Shannon Estuary in Co. Limerick. With the encouragement of the poet Aubrey de Vere she converted to Catholicism c.1887. An active nationalist, she was a member of The Gaelic League (to promote the Irish language), becoming a good friend of one of the founders, Douglas Hyde, who in 1938 was elected unopposed as the first President of Ireland.

Following her death in 1909, Charlotte's nephew Stephen Gwynn put together a *Memoir* with a selection of her writings (Gwynn, 1909). He described her as a young woman with '... light brown locks always in admired disorder ... her broad square figure ... loosely garbed in garments of her own making' (Fig. 1), and her character comes across clearly too: her 'personal magnetism ... vivid, vigorous, eccentric, and most loveable personality ... rashness of nature ... and with complete disregard of advice', as well as her 'constitutional disregard of public opinion' and 'a passionate love of her country'. Her dogs were an important part of her household and she had several hedgehogs as pets, all called Gruffy.



**Figure 1. Charlotte Grace O'Brien in her late forties in 1894.
Image courtesy of Anthony O'Brien**

In the *Memoir* Gwynn comments that he had few documents from the last ten years of her life. Although he was well aware of her interest in nature, he doesn't seem to have realised how much actual botanical work she had done. He noted 'how strong a stamp had been set upon her mind by that study of scientific books which, especially in her early life, had gone hand in hand with minute observation of living nature'. Her friend and kinswoman Catherine Spring Rice gave Gwynn the following impression of Charlotte after her death: 'Few women have the intense delight she took in all that belongs to open-air life, coupled with her keen interest in the world of letters. Natural history, poetry, books of all kinds – religious, scientific, historical – everything came as grist to her mill'. She also recollected Charlotte's long walks over hill and dale, her botanising expeditions and her daring swims, 'and when advancing years had put an end to all these, her long days of hard work among her flowers [in her garden], her love for which amounting to a passion ...' There is mention too of the many botanising excursions made with her brother Donough O'Brien and their 'very close friend ... and a skilled ally' Miss Knowles from the Dublin Museum, but surprisingly the *Memoir* doesn't refer specifically to her botanical achievements in north-west Limerick which resulted in the publication with Matilda Knowles of the 'The Flora of the Barony of Shanid' (Knowles & O'Brien, 1907).

The following account of Charlotte's quite considerable knowledge about wild plants and of her botanical work fills some of the gaps during those final ten years, particularly 1902-1907, and adds another strand to her full and varied life.

Early years and love of nature

Charlotte was brought up in the mid-west of Ireland at Cahirmoyle on the family estate near Ardagh in the lowlands of west Limerick and she always had an interest in her countryside surroundings – the wild plants, birds and other animals – leading to a lifelong love of nature. On her fifteenth birthday her mother Lucy O'Brien gave her the first volume of Wood's (1859) *The Illustrated Natural History* 'Mammalia', inscribed 'Charlotte Grace OBrien November 23rd 1860 from her Mother'. Lucy died in 1861 and there are two further volumes of that work, 'Birds' (1862) and 'Reptiles' (1863), with Charlotte's name in them. She later inherited Johnson's (1861) *The Grasses of Great Britain* (with illustrations by the renowned John Sowerby) from her father, inscribed 'William S. OBrien October 1862', then 'Charlotte G. OBrien' (an apostrophe was not always used in OBrien by this family). It is very likely that there were many other general and specialised natural history books in the library at Cahirmoyle.

As a young woman, Charlotte led a busy life, first attending to her father, then helping with the household at Cahirmoyle and looking after her widowed brother Edward's three children - Nelly, Dermod and Mary - all under the age of five when their mother Mary Spring Rice died in 1868. However, Stephen Gwynn remembered that when she was visiting his mother (her older sister Lucy) and family in Donegal, Charlotte was 'free from domestic cares, the delightful and delighted companion of our elders and us children on long excursions when there would be much talk of the haunts of various wild flowers and ferns'. She was a no-nonsense person: 'Wasps used to be set to crawl on the children's hands, that the young might learn to avoid being stung by not flinching; and as for the refusal to handle any living creature, worm, frog, or spider it was not tolerated for an instant'.

By 1879 Charlotte's brother Edward was living in England and in 1880 he married his second wife Julia Marshall. His son Dermot went to school there and was followed to England by his sisters, now teenagers. Charlotte was bereft at losing the care of the three children she had looked after for most of their young lives in Ireland, but she continued her close relationship with them. She wrote to her younger niece Mary in 1882, '... as soon as you go to Cahirmoyle I will go there for a fortnight or so, and go a-maying. Then will the cowslips shine forth among the dewy grasses, then will the tender blossoms of the crab-trees array themselves in rosy light ... I found a little slug eating my fern the other day. I didn't murder it, it looked so tender and innocent. I took it away and put it in some moss. I could have kissed it only it was so slimy.' In another letter to Mary (as 'Dear Molly'), when she was worried about her health and talked about death, she wrote 'I think I should feel the separation from the little earthly things, the flowers especially ...' (Gwynn, 1909).

Charlotte Grace O'Brien's writings with botanical interest

Charlotte's love of nature and close observations come into her writings and some of her poems, for example:

'... Plucked the wild crab still wet with April rains,
Masses of tinted white with rose red stains ...
... See! There the hawthorn sways,
There the sweet primrose decks the grassy plains ...'
(From 'The way to church'; in *Cahirmoyle*)

and

'... Ere the crimson poppy unfolded its buds,
Or smoothed out its wrinkled array ...
And the trembling corn-flowers have lifted their heads,
Their blue eyes filled with tears ...'

(From 'Song – in the dawn'; in *Lyrics*)

As well as poems, Charlotte wrote essays and one novel, also many articles when she became more active politically and for her campaigning work. The novel *Light and Shade*, published in 1878 in two volumes, was a dramatic tale based on a Fenian rising in Co. Limerick some years earlier, including the desperate living conditions of the poor. Her descriptions of vegetation and plants are unusually accurate, for example, 'The drive itself was overgrown with dead or seeding ragweed and long grasses, and bordered by a field dense with decaying thistles, docks, loose strife [*Lythrum salicaria*], rushes and flag iris', all typical of poor wet grassland. Elsewhere she describes 'a rocky, craggy wilderness, where the sparse grass struggled to hold its footing against a wild growth of low tufted roses that made the grey rocks sweet and beautiful in the months of May and June [no doubt *Rosa spinosissima*]. In and out amongst the stones, wherever the way was too rough for the cattle to pass, grew also the wild guelder rose [*Viburnum opulus*] and the stone rubus [*Rubus saxatilis*], the cornel [*Cornus sanguinea*] and the hazel bushes, and occasionally on a very bright hot summer's day might be seen that rare sight in Ireland, a lizard darting in and out of the dark crevices'. Places with limestone outcrop such as this could be found not far from Cahirmoyle. The dark green covers of the two volumes are embossed with sprays of Shamrocks and another attractive feature is the placing of little drawings of garden Snowdrops and

wild *Potentilla erecta* or *Convolvulus arvensis* where there is space at the end of some chapters.

In an essay 'A jog, jog journey from Dublin to Limerick' in a horse and carriage (Gwynn, 1909), Charlotte described some of the plants she saw along the way. 'These canals were bordered with bog-bean [*Menyanthes trifoliata*], with its graceful and beautiful white flower and fine leafage; then golden water lilies [*Nuphar lutea*] and marsh marigold [*Caltha palustris*], and I doubt not, in their seasons, many more lovely plants.' Near Rathangan in Co. Kildare, she found '... another charming remembrance – the Irish wall toad-flax (*Linaria cymbalaria*) in a snow-white variety just touched with pale yellow in the centre. A sweet little plant, like fairy carving in ivory, leaf and growth and flower all so perfect.' Now called Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*), this garden escape with more usual purple flowers is very common on walls across Ireland.

A book titled *Wild Flowers of the Undercliff, Isle of Wight* (O'Brien & Parkinson, 1881) has been wrongly attributed to Charlotte Grace O'Brien (Appendix 1).

First plant specimens, 1875

In April 1875 Charlotte was staying with her Spring Rice family connection at Mount Trenchard only a few kilometres west of Foynes when she collected two wild plants of note, and her dried specimens of these are in the National Herbarium at the National Botanic Gardens in Dublin. She found fern fronds in a cave on the Shannon shore near Foynes harbour in April 1875 which were originally named as '*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* var. *acutum?*'. In 1977 one of the four fronds was determined by Donal Synnott as *A. adiantum-nigrum* subsp. *onopteris* (now *A. onopteris*), uncommon in Ireland and mostly occurring in the south-west. Charlotte's other specimen was of parasitic *Lathraea squamaria* from Mount Trenchard, dated 7 April 1875. A letter from her, headed 'Mount Trenchard' with the same 7 April date and attached to the *Lathraea* specimen, was sent to Alexander Goodman More at the Natural History section of the Dublin Museum of Science and Art. He was also the co-author of *Cybele Hibernica* (Moore & More, 1866).

'Dear Mr More,

As good luck would have it your letter found me here and I have been able to collect today some fronds of different specimens of *Asplenium*, and have been particularly fortunate in procuring from the same spot, a little cave near the river, specimens showing well the *acutum* form and the common form, both affected by the dark and damp but retaining the difference. I also send specimens from the wall sides, in many of which you will see a tendency to the *acutum* form but I do not think it ever becomes perfectly marked except in very sheltered damp dark spots. I have not been able to send you today any really good fronds of *acutum* but hope to be able to get some for you soon. I enclose also a bit of this pink thing of which I have forgotten the name [*Lathraea squamaria*] and have not my book here. I think it is not common, at least I have not seen it except at Mount Trenchard. For I am much better at recognizing a strange flower than at keeping long names in my head. Thanks for the list. Whenever I get my list made out I shall be much interested to compare them. I am always glad to answer any questions as far as I can, but have not much time now for botanizing except when I come here. I remain yours very truly, CG O'Brien'

Written by her over the top of the letter and down the side of the page: 'I see your letter must have been delayed. I only got it this morning [smudge on letter]. I hear the tufted form of *Asplenium trichomanes* grows about Castletown Askeaton Limerick and that *Polypodium cambricum* grows in Askeaton Abbey – but I do not vouch for that.'

Charlotte sent the specimens of the two plants with this letter, later mounted on standard white card at the Museum and labelled (by Miss Knowles), also retaining her note with the *Asplenium*: 'Specimens taken from same spot – a cave on the [Shannon] river bank'. A.G. More and Charlotte were obviously in contact before April 1875 as he had sent her a list of plants, most likely those not yet recorded in Limerick. The 'book' referred to in her letter was probably the illustrated second edition of Bentham's (1865) *Handbook of the British Flora, a description of the flowering plants and ferns indigenous to, or naturalized in, The British Isles*, 'for the use of beginners and amateurs'.

At the time A.G. More would have been compiling records for a second edition of *Cybele Hibernica*, again giving the main habitats and geographical distribution of higher plant species in Ireland, including locations for the less common. More died in 1895, and Charlotte's record for the fern as 'var. *acutum*' of '*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* - Black Spleenwort' was included in the second edition, attributed to 'Miss G.C. O'Brien' (Colgan & Scully, 1898). Charlotte collected another specimen from the 'smugglers cave' at Foynes in 1902, but the rare *A. onopteris* has not been refound there (the shale forming the cave has been much eroded since then), nor elsewhere in Limerick.

Rekindling of interest and botanical work in 1902

Charlotte was not the only member of her family with an interest in wild plants. Her older brother Donough (Robert Donough O'Brien), an architect, was an active member of the Limerick Field Club since its founding in 1892 (Reynolds & Scannell, 1992a, b). Donough was a competent botanist who was the first to find *Schoenoplectus triqueter* in 1900 on tidal mud along the upper Shannon Estuary, that species now protected by law in Ireland. Another of her brothers, Lucius (Lucius Henry O'Brien, later Dean of Limerick), discovered *Rumex maritimus* at Lough Gur in the same year, and still only known at that site in Limerick.

Already a renowned Irish naturalist, Robert Lloyd Praeger visited Limerick in 1900 to do fieldwork and while there inspected the brothers' recent discoveries. The following year, his *Irish Topographical Botany* was published (Praeger, 1901), an important milestone in Irish botany. Essentially it was the first census of vascular plants found in each of 40 county divisions in Ireland; the larger counties such as Cork and Kerry were subdivided. Locations and most recent records were given only for rare plants or those of special interest. It is very likely that Donough would have bought or seen *Irish Topographical Botany* and looked through it with interest. I have surmised that Donough would have shown that work to Charlotte - or she may well have had her own copy - and she checked what plant species were listed for Limerick. She might then have noticed that plants she knew to occur in the county were missing from Praeger's census. Whatever the actual reason, Charlotte became more actively involved in botanising and collecting specimens from 1902 on.

During the summer of 1902 Charlotte sent a large batch of specimens from Foynes and surrounding areas to Miss Knowles at the Dublin Museum of Science and

Art. Praeger (1903) also examined them, acknowledging the important contribution made by 'Miss Charlotte O'Brien' in Limerick and publishing locations for about 20 of them, including a few records of species not listed for the county in *Irish Topographical Botany*, such as *Trifolium medium* from her old family home at Cahirmoyle and the arable weed *Roemeria argemone* from Foynes.

Matilda Cullen Knowles (1864-1933), also known as Matty Knowles, was born in Co. Antrim and was already an accomplished botanist by the 1890s, trusted by Praeger to provide reliable records for his *Irish Topographical Botany*. By 1902 she was at the Dublin Museum where she worked on and curated plant collections, and later in life was the author of her significant publication in 1929, *The Lichens of Ireland*.

Charlotte, then in her late fifties, and Matilda in her late thirties met in August 1902. A specimen of *Vicia sepium* was collected by both of them at Foynes that month and there is also a specimen of *Linum bienne* collected by Matilda at Loghill west of Foynes. Another of Matilda's, dated 25 September, was of *Littorella uniflora* from a 'bog' near Foynes. During her first visit, Matilda gave Charlotte a copy of *The London Catalogue of British Plants* (Ninth edition, 1895; later stamped 'National Museum Dublin', 'Botany'), which was a printed list of scientific plant names arranged in systematic order. The original inscription in Matilda's hand reads 'Miss C.G. OBrien & M.C. Knowles August 1902' and 'Flora of Foynes'; '& Barony of Shanid' was added later. The rationale was that Charlotte could annotate her botanical finds on a ready-made list. The two ladies continued to get together and botanise in Limerick over the next four years. It was an ideal partnership – Charlotte knew that part of Limerick well and where to look for notable plants, while Matilda had the greater botanical expertise.

Barony of Shanid

The Barony of Shanid in north-west Co. Limerick is bordered by Co. Kerry on its west side, by the Shannon Estuary in the north (including Glin and Foynes), and the eastern boundary extends south from near Aughinish Island to near Ardagh (including Cahirmoyle), then south-west to the Kerry border south of Athea (Fig. 2). Matilda later commented that although the district was a populous one, there were few villages and no accommodation to be had so that her and Charlotte's expeditions were made from Ardanoir or from Cahirmoyle, and that necessitated such long days and so much driving (in horse and trap) that they could do little more than a general survey of the flora (Knowles & O'Brien, 1907).

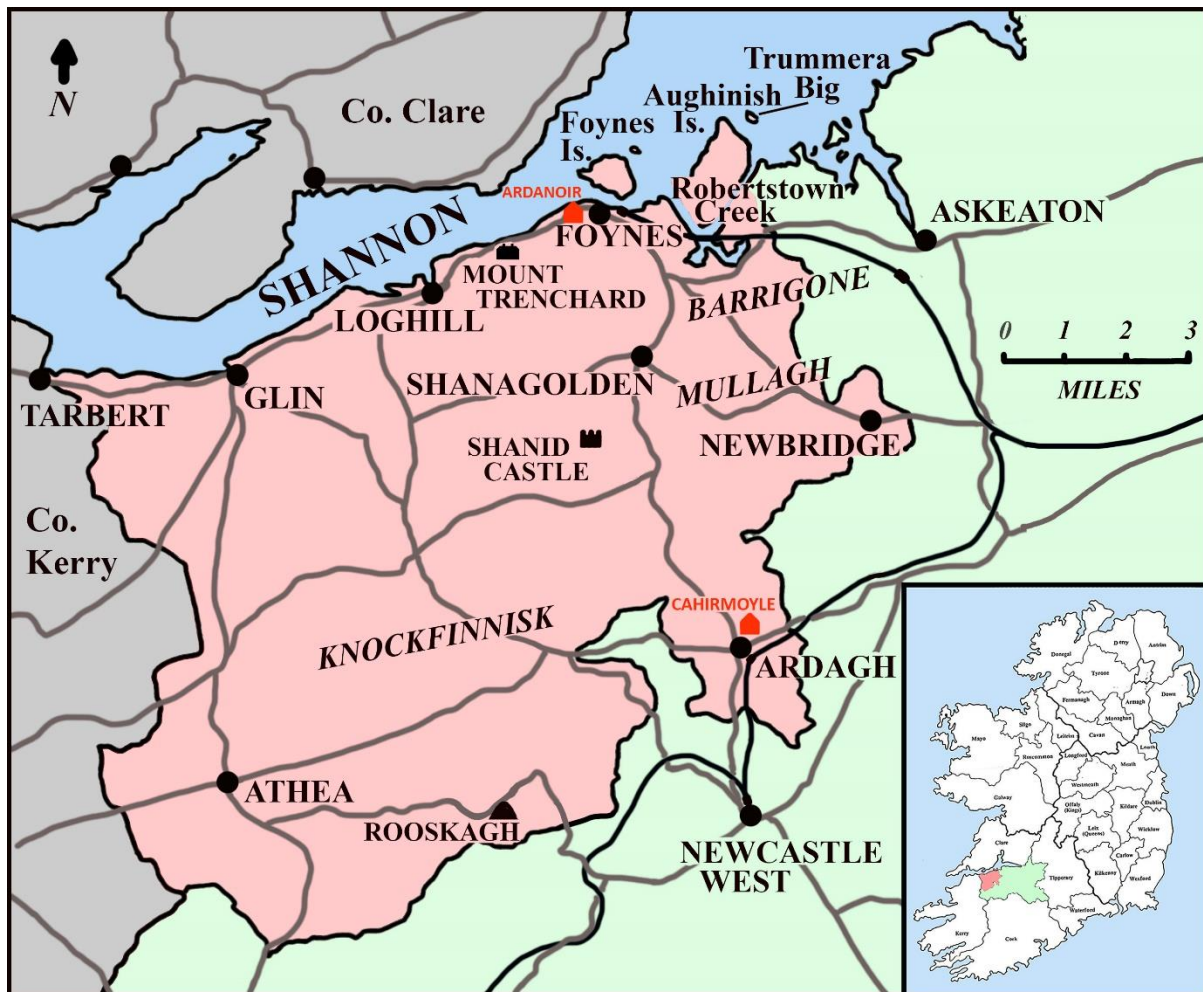


Figure 2. Barony of Shanid, Co. Limerick c.1900, with principal places mentioned in the text. Charlotte Grace O'Brien's homes are shown in red

The Barony was interesting botanically because it encompassed a wide range of habitats both on and off the limestone. Grassland with outcropping limestone and marshes in the north-eastern part were species-rich. Bogs and heathy ground covered much of the western uplands, where the highest point was at Rooskagh (= Knockanimpaha; 344 m). There was some woodland, while the estuary itself provided a variety of habitats. The eastern boundary of the Barony just reached the River Deel at Newbridge and there were a few smaller rivers, but no lakes and no ponds (apart from the little reservoir at Foynes).

Botanical work in 1903

In 1903 Charlotte started collecting plants again in springtime. Knowles (1903) noted that she was 'working steadily at the flora of the Barony of Shanid' and sending specimens from that district, including non-native *Tragopogon porrifolius* found with native *T. pratensis* in meadows near Robertstown Creek east of Foynes. Then Matilda and Charlotte botanised together over three weeks in June, based at Ardanoir and confining their attention to the immediate neighbourhood of Foynes. They were fortunate in finding a number of interesting plants such as *Neottia nidus-avis* growing in profusion in the wood at Mount Trenchard and *Equisetum variegatum* in a large swamp at Barrigone, the latter new to the county. On 22 June

Charlotte visited Castleconnell Bog in north-east Limerick with her brother Donough, there collecting *Myrica gale* and uncommon *Huperzia selago*. Matilda also published records of Donough's that year from other parts of Limerick (Knowles, 1903). The following year she attributed one 1902 and two 1903 records to Charlotte of *Fumaria capreolata*, *F. bastardii* (as *F. confusa*) and *F. officinalis*; these specimens had been checked by a British specialist (Knowles, 1904).

In July 1903 Charlotte found *Ononis repens* (formerly *O. arvensis*) on the railway bank near Robertstown Creek and collected a specimen. That species was still growing there over a century later at and near the old railway bridge across the creek with its tidal water (Reynolds, 2013). Charlotte thought that Matilda had overlooked it on her June visit and it led to her writing this verse (Gwynn, 1909):

'See you not, O Matty mine,
How you walked and trotted
Right along the bridge o'er brine;
Called from Rhobart, knight so fine,
Of the Normans, ancient line,
Yet you never spotted

Ononis
Arvensis, Miss'

While in Dublin in 1903, Charlotte kept her eye out for unusual plants and there are two records of hers in Colgan's (1904) *Flora of the County Dublin*. They are *Poa nemoralis*, abundant in hedgerows and under trees at Ashbrook, Clontarf, and *Mycelis muralis* in the grounds of Saint Anne's, Donnybrook, probably an introduction there. Colgan also mentioned that Miss C.G. O'Brien had observed atypical plants of *Arum maculatum* with dark 'blotches' and 'pseudo-blisters' on the leaves near Foynes in Co. Limerick.

Botanical work in 1904-1906

Matilda again joined Charlotte to botanise in Limerick in 1904. As well as more exploring around the greater Foynes area, they ventured further afield in the Barony, for example, to a wet bog at Knockfinnisk in the western uplands where they found Limerick rarities *Drosera anglica* and *Carex limosa*; and along the Shannon shore finding *Salix repens* west of Loughill and towards Tarbert, the last not refound since. They collected aquatic plants in the River Deel, such as *Ranunculus circinatus* and a *Potamogeton*, a specimen of which was re-determined many years later as an uncommon hybrid (*P. x angustifolius*). Another 1904 specimen was of *Linaria purpurea* at Mount Trenchard, established on the kitchen-garden walls there, where Charlotte had known it for the previous 40 years.

There is little published information on Charlotte and Matilda's fieldwork in 1904 to 1906. It is clear that Matilda did most of the collecting and all the mounting of the plant specimens, and some information about their activities can be gleaned from the labels on the herbarium sheets now in the National Herbarium (see below), although they often lacked exact dates. We know that Matilda was in Limerick in August and September 1905, revisiting sites as well as going to new ones, including Foynes Island. In July that year a young grandnephew of Charlotte's, Aubrey Gwynn (later an esteemed Jesuit and historian), was credited with the first Limerick record for *Chamaenerion angustifolium* at the Glenastar waterfall near Ardagh. It is a rare

native, as at Glenastar, and more commonly considered an introduction in Ireland. There are several other specimens of Aubrey's in the National Herbarium dated 1905 and 1906, and a few of his younger brother's, Denis Gwynn (later a journalist, writer and Professor of modern Irish history), dated 1904 and 1905. It was their father Stephen Gwynn who wrote the *Memoir* after Charlotte died.

In Praeger's (1906) Supplement to *Irish Topographical Botany*, which summarises new records for 1901-1905, he states that 'Limerick heads the list [of the 40 county divisions] with 104 additional species and subspecies' and that 'Miss Knowles and Miss O'Brien, working at the Barony of Shanid, have made great additions to the flora'. Of the 104 records given, about a third are theirs.

Finishing off fieldwork towards their Flora of the Barony, 1906 appears to have been a particularly busy year for Charlotte and Matilda. For example, in May specimens were collected from near the Shannon Estuary, at Old Abbey near Shanagolden, in grassland and limestone crags at Mullagh south-east of Foynes, on crags and in a quarry at Foynes and at Shanid Castle. In June, more specimens were from a number of the same places as well as at Glenastar, Mount Trenchard and a bog near Athea. Then in August there were collections again from some of the same areas, also from the River Deel near Newbridge, Cahirmoyle and the River Galey below Rooskagh. Donough was involved in a number of these expeditions, as he had been in earlier ones. In the Botanical Division Register at the Dublin Museum, there is an entry written by Matilda Knowles dated 26 June 1906: '200 sheets of flowering plants from Co. Limerick (chiefly from the Barony of Shanid)', with a 'price' of £4.

It is likely that Charlotte also went off botanising on her own, as there are more specimens of hers for 1906 than there were for 1904 and 1905. They include *Alchemilla filicaulis* near a quarry at Foynes, *Viola canina* from wet ground at Old Abbey, and *Oenanthe lachenalii* and *Zostera marina* from the Robertstown Creek area. She noted the pink-flowered form of common native *Calystegia sepium* and hers is the first Limerick record for non-native *C. silvatica* in her garden at Ardanoir, described as 'introduced' there; the latter was first recorded in the wild in Ireland in 1896 and is now widely established. There is also a 1906 specimen of the rare arable weed *Roemeria hispida* (as *Papaver hybridum*) attributed to Miss Peggy Briscoe, a good friend of Charlotte's and fellow member of the Gaelic League, and who may have accompanied her in the field.

Like her brothers, Charlotte was a member of the Limerick Field Club, but she doesn't seem to have gone on excursions which were chiefly to places in north-east Limerick and south-east Clare, and so not easy to get to from Foynes. However, there are mentions of her providing plant specimens in the *Journal of the Limerick Field Club* (Reynolds & Scannell, 1992a): 'Numerous objects of interest were on view, including the additions to the Club herbarium ... and Miss O'Brien has sent some of the rarer plants from the west of the county ...' (annual report, 1904); and '... additions to the Limerick flora were exhibited and some rare plants from the west of the county by Miss O'Brien and Miss Knowles' (annual report, 1906). There are just five specimens of hers in the Field Club herbarium, including *Lithospermum officinale* dated 1900, *Veronica montana* in 1903 from Foynes and *Galium album*, also 1903, from her home at Ardanoir. At the annual meeting of the Limerick Field Club, Charlotte's death in 1909 was reported, noting that her [published] Flora with Miss Knowles was 'a model of what may be done for every barony in Ireland' and

that in a visit of the Club to Foynes, they were hospitably entertained at Ardanoir (*Limerick Chronicle*, 13 January 1910).

Finally, unusually large plants of *Puccinellia maritima* (as *Glyceria maritima*) on mud flats and in saltmarshes at Robertstown Creek off the Shannon Estuary puzzled Matilda in 1903, so she sent specimens that year and in 1904 to specialists abroad who suggested the name *Glyceria foucaudii* (Knowles, 1903, 1905). Again, in May 1906, while Matilda was exploring small islands in the estuary with Donough and Miss Briscoe, they came across large tussocks of the same grass with immature flowers (which she now called *G. festucaeformis*) on Trummera Big islet near Aughinish Island. She took two roots, one of which was planted in Charlotte's garden where it later flowered. Wanting still more specimens, Matilda wrote to Charlotte in early July asking her to get a good gathering of the grass in full flower from Trummera Big. 'This she very kindly did, sending me two large tussocks', pieces of which were sent to a botanist in the British Museum (Knowles, 1906). Over the years, there continued to be uncertainty about the identity of plants that were not typically stoloniferous and prostrately-growing *P. maritima*. Then in 2004 Bruno Ryves (BSBI Referee for grasses) examined the early specimens as well as modern collections, and concluded that all were growth forms of very variable *P. maritima* and that the tussocky plants in Ireland were an extreme growth form of that species (Reynolds, 2006).

The annotated *London Catalogue*

The original *London Catalogue of British Plants* annotated by Charlotte and Matilda is housed at the National Botanic Gardens and gives a good insight into how they worked together (Fig. 3). They both annotated it, marking the commonest species with a 'C' and usually no further details. Locations were given on inter-leaved blank pages for the less common species, sometimes with additional comments about the habitat, for example, 'cultivated fields', 'common on limestone', 'gravel pit' or 'Shannon shore'. Species not included in the printed *Catalogue* were written in by hand and then annotated.

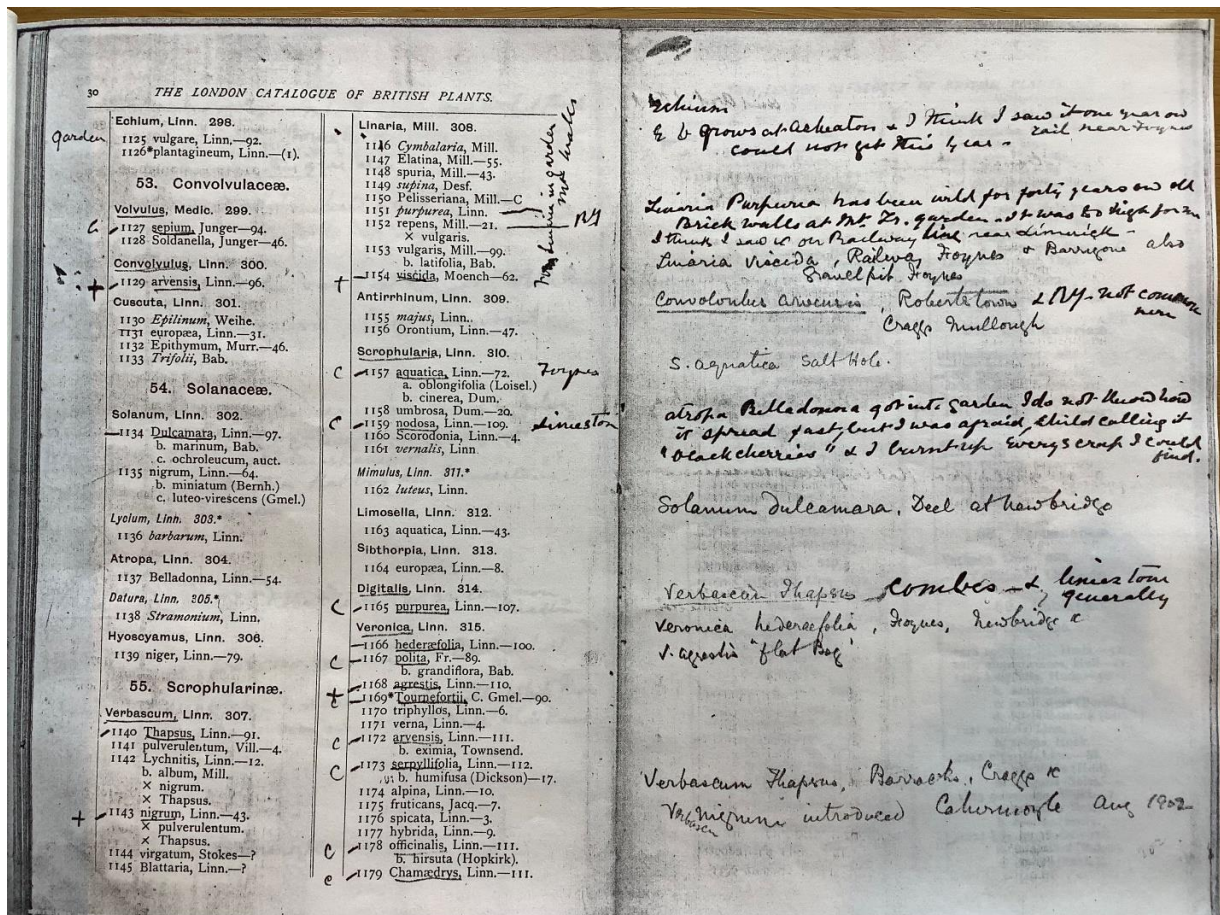


Figure 3. Two pages from *The London Catalogue of British Plants* annotated by Charlotte Grace O'Brien (less tidy, darker ink) and Matilda Knowles. The original is housed at the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin

It was usually Matilda who identified the more difficult plant groups such as grasses, sedges and willows. Most of the species they documented were natives. Otherwise they indicated whether a plant didn't occur naturally in the wild, for example, 'Parsnip escape – they escape always', or *Petasites (fragrans)* 'in quantity in Mount Trenchard, but probably introduced. Ditto Ardanoir'; the latter (now *P. pyrenaicus*) was already becoming naturalised by the mid-19th century in Ireland. *Sempervivum tectorum* was described as 'The luck plant – every cottage if thatched', because it has succulent leaves and, in folklore, was believed to protect against fire. Trees such as Beech and White Poplar were noted as 'Planted'.

Charlotte obviously was concerned about a very poisonous plant because she wrote 'Atropa belladonna got into garden I do not know how - it spread fast, but I was afraid, child calling it "black cherries" & I burnt up every scrap I could find'. She also wrote an interesting piece in the *London Catalogue* under the heading 'Flora of Foynes - & Barony of Shanid', with her thoughts about the work to be undertaken and how prolifically some plants can seed themselves and spread: 'This little corner would be the work of years to beat properly – yet they think they know all the flora of Great Britain & will have no 'casuals'. Casuals are the parents of the daily new creation. Look at my rayless ragweed for instance a 'casual' [presumably *Senecio vulgaris*]. If it seeded on good ground it might produce 100 plants – each of them

100 x 10,000. There you are for a 'casual'! A gardener knows how one head of bloom will give a multitude in many plants'. She ended the piece with: 'Lay thine hand upon thy mouth O Mary for the glory of God and the richness of the earth are before thee.'

Matilda and Charlotte wrote notes to each other too on the annotated *Catalogue*: Charlotte 'I think Campanula is trachelium - very rough' and Matilda agreed 'It is! Campanula trachelium, Cahirmoyle July 1903'; and about the common woodland plant *Sanicula europaea*, Charlotte 'I sent that' and Matilda 'Yes you did'. Towards the final stages of their work, there is a note by Charlotte 'Be sure to see my localities - yours were wrong' and Matilda replied 'All localities corrected & brought up to date, Jan 6 1906 M.C.K'.

Some years earlier in 1889 Donough had given his sister *Illustrations of the British Flora* (Fitch & Smith, 1887) with its clear black and white line drawings. This must have been an important reference book for her when doing Barony of Shanid fieldwork because it contains locations in her writing for many of the same species and with similar information as in the annotated *London Catalogue*. It also has a picture of a young Matilda Knowles stuck in opposite the title page (Fig. 4). There is just one reference by Charlotte in the *London Catalogue* to 'Sowerby', the volumes of *Sowerby's English Botany* with their detailed descriptions and hand-coloured plates, several editions of which appeared in the 1800s. She noted 'Lords & Ladies [*Arum maculatum*] but it is not spotted & is rich red when in full flower, not like Sowerbys picture at all', which shows the leaf with dark spots and a green 'flower'. It is likely that she would have brought these volumes with her to Ardanoir from Cahirmoyle.

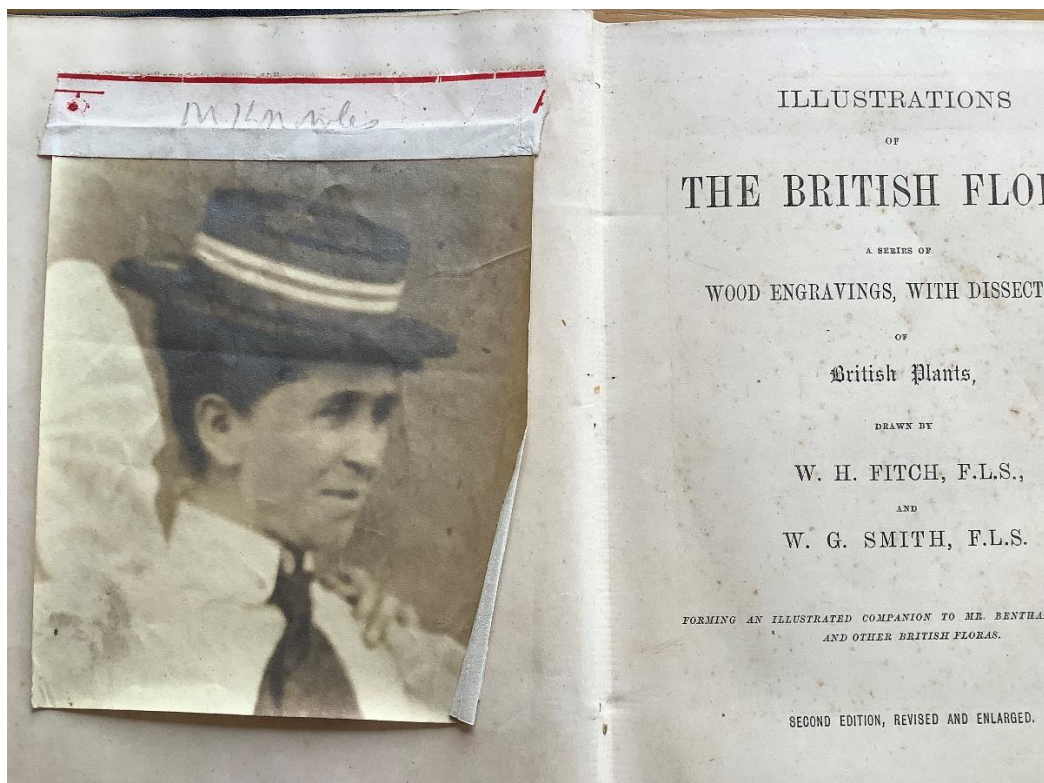


Figure 4. Photograph of Matilda Knowles stuck into Charlotte Grace O'Brien's copy of *Illustrations of the British Flora* (Fitch & Smith, 1887)

Voucher specimens

With regard to Charlotte's Limerick plant specimens, at least 235 are now part of the main Irish collection in the National Herbarium at the National Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin in Dublin (**DBN**) and hundreds more are Matilda's, no doubt collected by her while out botanising with Charlotte, or on her own or with Donough. Limerick Field Club specimens, mainly from the late 1890s, have been kept as a separate collection at the National Herbarium, only five of which are attributed to Charlotte. There is a smaller collection of 72 Limerick specimens dated 1902-1904 in the Limerick Museum, about half of which are Charlotte's and less than half are Matilda's. Some are duplicates or near duplicates of those in the National Herbarium and it is not clear how they ended up in Limerick.

A favourite plant, Milk Thistle

A rare plant found at ruined Shanid Castle south of Foynes must have been a favourite of Charlotte's because she wrote about it in her essay 'Shanid Castle', including local historical context (Gwynn, 1909). 'My especial mission this time to the castle was also suggestive. There is a certain very rare thistle, with large smooth leaves and great feathery heads, called the Milk Thistle [*Silybum marianum*], or, in Ireland, the "Virgin Mary's Thistle". The reason it is so called is because the leaves are all blotched and marbled with white stains, and legend made it a sacred plant, bearing for ever stains of the Blessed Virgin's milk. Now, I had it in my mind that thirty years ago I had seen this plant at the castle, and as my brother [Donough] had told me it was also found at Askeaton, I wished to confirm my impression. Sure enough, I found a mass of it growing together, only on the southern exposure, under the great wall. Now, this plant is said to exist only as an introduced plant in the British Isles. To account for it, therefore, on this utterly lonely and desolate hill-top, we must look back through the centuries and see the sacred plant in the monastery garden at Askeaton (mind, Askeaton was the great Geraldine home in Desmond). We must think how the seed may – in fact, must – have been carried up to this watch tower, perhaps by some long-haired daughter of the Geraldines, sent for safety to the mountain fortress; we must imagine how its frail growth (only annual) took hold on the sheltered side; we must see generation after generation of men swept away, the monastery torn down and desecrated, the name of Desmond almost forgotten, the great Geraldine race broken and destroyed; we must see the almost impregnable castle blown to pieces and left as a trampling ground for the summer-heated cattle; more wonderful than all, we must realise that time has so gone by that no record is left us of the great downfall and destruction – nothing – nothing but a few pieces of nine-foot thick wall, a few earth mounds, and the sacred plant. Irishmen! What national history lies in one seed of that plant. Think of it! realise it!'

Charlotte sent a specimen of *Silybum marianum* to the Dublin Museum in 1902, probably after she went to 'confirm [her] impression'. It was also collected by Matilda in 1906 and described as being in great abundance at Shanid Castle. This species is considered a rare relict of ancient cultivation in Ireland and in places well established around ruins. Apparently, it was grown for medicinal purposes, but science has not confirmed its effectiveness (Wyse Jackson, 2014). Despite careful searches, it has not been refound at Askeaton Abbey (reported from there in 1901 by Donough) nor at Shanid, but in 1999 it was found growing in pasture around

ruined Dysert Castle some 7 km to the north-east of Shanid Castle, towards the Shannon Estuary.

'The Flora of the Barony of Shanid'

'The Flora of the Barony of Shanid' was published in June 1907 in the *Irish Naturalist* (Knowles & O'Brien, 1907). Although both Charlotte and Matilda contributed most of the plant records, it was Matilda who actually wrote the paper, with the address given at the end as 'Dublin Museum'. She starts by describing the Barony and previous botanical work in that part of Co. Limerick, including that 'Mr. Praeger himself, under the guidance of Mr. Donough O'Brien, made a hurried tour of the crags and skimmed the botanical cream off the Mullough [Mullagh] district' (in 1900).

The main section gives full accounts of the habitats visited with the characteristic or rare plants found in them, pointing out that the most interesting feature of the Barony was the striking contrast between the flora of the limestone area and that of the shales and coal measures. Much of the inland part of the Barony remained unexplored as Charlotte and Matilda had not been able to give it as thorough a search as the more easily reached northern part. In terms of numbers, they recorded 637 species (species used in the broad sense) in the Barony, compared to 623 for the whole of Limerick in Praeger's (1901) *Irish Topographical Botany*, including over 60 species additional to those given for the county in that work.

Nearly all the species mentioned in this paper are included in the *Flora's* habitat descriptions or in the 'Annotated list of rarer plants' at the end. That list (without dates) contains many of the same details as had been handwritten in Charlotte and Matilda's copy of the *London Catalogue*. Of the 186 species listed, about two-thirds were rare or localised natives in Limerick, including *Cochlearia danica*, *Clinopodium ascendens* and *Euphorbia hyberna*. The remaining species were non-natives, about half of which were originally cultivated plants or garden escapes such as *Clematis vitalba*, *Erysimum cheiri*, *Saponaria officinalis* and *Humulus lupulus*. The other half were casuals, usually found in disturbed ground, and arable weeds, for example, *Papaver* and *Roemeria* species, *Lamium hybridum* and *Agrostemma githago*. Two charophyte algae are named at the end of the list. It is worth noting here that a number of the species on the list have since been re-evaluated, including re-determination of voucher specimens.

The authors of the *Flora* gave their best thanks to eight specialists, including Praeger, who helped with the identification of critical species. They then expressed their deep obligation to Donough who at all times put himself and his horse and trap at their disposal and assisted them in their explorations. Mrs Dermod O'Brien (Mabel O'Brien, wife of Charlotte's nephew) was also thanked for her hospitality at Cahirmoyle and Master Denis Gwynn for help in collecting specimens. In Praeger's (1908) 'Additions to *Irish Topographical Botany* in 1906-1907', he noted that the most complete work in Ireland carried out for that period was 'Miss Knowles' survey of the Barony of Shanid, resulting in a plant list larger than that previously existing for the whole of Co. Limerick'. It seems a surprising omission that he did not name her co-worker and co-author, Miss O'Brien!

Changes in the flora of the Barony of Shanid since 1907

To add context to Charlotte and Matilda's findings, some examples of losses, gains and changes in the Barony since their time are given here. Rare native species recorded by them which have not been refound include *Ranunculus baudotii* in Foynes where its pond now in the port area has been partially filled in and much degraded, *Scirpus sylvaticus* by the River Deel, and *Botrychium lunaria* in grassland among limestone crags south-east of Foynes, although it is an inconspicuous little fern and may have been overlooked. New sites have been found for some of their rarities, as for *Trifolium medium* at Mullagh, *Asplenium marinum* by the Shannon Estuary at Glin, and *Hypericum humifusum* and *Veronica montana* on Foynes Island. A number of native species have been added to the list for the Barony. Insectivorous *Pinguicula grandiflora* was found by Charlotte's niece Margaret O'Brien in 1935 on a wet bog at Glenbaun-Knockfinnisk, the same area in the western uplands where Charlotte and Matilda had botanised. Better known in the Burren, *Neotinea maculata* was first noted at Barrigone in 1979, its only site in Limerick, and also *Ophrys insectifera* at Barrigone in 2000 (Reynolds, 2013).

In more recent times, three plant species found by Charlotte and Matilda, along with their habitats, have been protected by law in Ireland. Currently *Viola hirta* is locally abundant in calcareous grassland and *Hordeum secalinum* occurs on Aughinish Island, although *Groenlandia densa* has not been seen in the Barony since 1904. There are now also designated protected areas in the Barony: the Lower River Shannon (Shannon Estuary) and Barrigone Special Areas of Conservation, and the Carrigkerry Bogs (which includes Knockfinnisk) and Moyreen Bog Natural Heritage Areas.

Of the non-native species not refound in the Barony, most were casuals in disturbed ground or arable weeds, not common even in Charlotte and Matilda's time, such as *Scandix pecten-veneris*, *Galeopsis speciosa* and *Valerianella dentata*. Some plants of cultivated origin not refound were also not common in their time, for example, *Marrubium vulgare* and *Chelidonium majus*, whereas *Clematis vitalba* has become more widespread and willows originally planted for basket-making are well established.

Ornamental *Crococsmia x crocosmiiflora* is also now well established in the wild by rivers and at bog edges in the Barony as well as along roadsides, no doubt discarded from gardens because of its vigorous growth. Records of it in the wild in Ireland date from the early 1930s. Another species, *Spartina anglica*, was deliberately introduced into Ireland to reclaim tidal mud flats, including an experimental planting at Foynes in 1931. It now forms extensive patches on mud flats along the Shannon Estuary. Spreading into the wild too is *Picea sitchensis*, self-seeding away from plantations onto bogs and heathy ground, and invasive *Reynoutria japonica* forms dense thickets.

In Charlotte's time, there would only have been a small harbour at Foynes, but Foynes Port is now one of the busiest in Ireland. Seeds of exotic plant species were accidentally introduced there mainly in the mid-1980s to early 1990s with animal feed, but such species tended not to establish themselves (Reynolds, 2002). Charlotte had an interest in casual species too, for example, collecting a specimen of *Securigera varia* in the hen-run at Cahirmoyle, perhaps introduced with foreign grain fed to the hens; also *Cannabis sativa* in a field near Shanagolden and *Linum usitatissimum* on the railway track at Foynes.

There are still relatively undisturbed habitats in the Barony of Shanid, including by the Shannon Estuary, calcareous grassland with outcropping limestone in the north-eastern part, small areas of woodland, and some boggy ground in the western uplands. Substantial changes, including the degradation or even disappearance of habitats, are also apparent since Charlotte and Matilda's survey. Extensive industrial works cover much of Aughinish Island; bogs have been cut over and drained for afforestation; vegetation cleared to make way for wind turbines; also rivers modified and drainage in the lowlands, including in the few fen areas; and there have been changes in agricultural practices with the loss of uncommon arable weeds.

Botanical legacy

The collaboration between locally knowledgeable Charlotte and the professional botanist Matilda Knowles resulted in the publication of their 'Flora of the Barony of Shanid' in 1907 in the *Irish Naturalist*, the relevant journal at the time. It was a good (if not comprehensive by their own admission) survey of a defined area in north-west Limerick over several years of fieldwork mainly in semi-natural habitats, and consultation with specialists added to the quality of their plant records. Up to that time, only a handful of Irish County Floras and a small number of other local Floras had been published.

For several years Robert Lloyd Praeger published updates to his *Irish Topographical Botany* (1901), including the additional Limerick records made by Charlotte and Matilda, with praise for the important contributions they had made. He also referenced their own Flora publication in *A Tourist's Flora of the West of Ireland* (Praeger, 1909) and in *The Botanist in Ireland* (Praeger, 1934), the latter another seminal work which provided an updated census list of plants for the entire country. The more recent *Flora of County Limerick* (Reynolds, 2013) cites about 700 of Charlotte and/or Matilda's Limerick records, including some 76 first county records and at least 175 of Charlotte's own specimens. A number of their records also appear as open circles on maps in the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland's plant distribution atlases, indicating that the species has not been refound in that 10-kilometre square (Preston *et al.*, 2002; Stroh *et al.*, 2023).

Between them, Charlotte and Matilda collected hundreds of plant specimens, most now housed in the National Herbarium in Dublin (**DBN**), and they are still in good condition over a hundred years later. In the light of continuing research and changes in plant taxonomy, these voucher specimens are invaluable. Quite a number of the specimens have already been re-determined, and they remain available for re-examination by current and future botanists.

If Charlotte had not made the initial contact by sending a large batch of specimens to the National Museum in 1902 which were seen by Matilda Knowles, the Barony of Shanid would not have been surveyed nor the Flora written! Towards the end of a very full life and along with her gardening and other activities, it is clear how much satisfaction and pleasure Charlotte got from her botanising with her good friend Matilda, also with her brother Donough, or just on her own.

Charlotte died unexpectedly, aged 63, on 3 June 1909. She had been writing a series of articles called 'The Making of our Home' which appeared in the monthly journal *Irish Gardening* since January 1909, describing the development of her garden at Ardanoir. In the final article published in June (O'Brien, 1909), Charlotte was looking to the future and an extract seems apt here: 'I have also sweet briars

coming on, and a lovely rose I got out of a ditch near Lough Derg that one botanist says is *Rosa Lucida* – a lovely thing at every season, large, flat rose-pink blooms with a big bunch of golden anthers, shining bronzy leaves, and orange-red berries in bunches of a peculiar shape, most helpful for autumn gathering. It is planted close to sweet briar and *R. rugosa*, so I expect to get hybrids out of the seedlings. Oh, yes! I look at my inch-high seedlings and say to myself I will have briar roses all over the whole place from the best seeds. I will have them growing in the midst of thorn and honey-suckle and furze; even as the wild briars grow, even so I will have them uplifting on their thorny arms the glory of the June summer. I will puzzle the botanists of another generation, and when my bones are dust and my good spade rust, when my house is pulled down and my garden asphalt and bricks, my extra special wild briars and my daffodils will still linger on the hillside and scent the bloomy air for generations that know me not, nor mine.'

Charlotte is buried on Knockpatrick above Foynes, and many years before she had chosen 'The grandest place in this world to my individuality; may my grave be there, and no other earth hold my bones' (Gwynn, 1909). Well over a century later Ardanoir is still standing and occupied, and in spring 2023 a patch of old-fashioned daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) flowered on the grassy hillside above her old home – and so the memory of Charlotte Grace O'Brien lives on.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Jennifer Redmond, Department of History, Maynooth University, for enjoyable and useful discussions about Charlotte Grace O'Brien; Anthony O'Brien for the family photograph of her; Nick Scott for kindly preparing the Barony of Shanid map; Dr Colin Kelleher for access to the National Herbarium at the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin; Colin Pope, BSBI vice-county recorder for Wight, and the late Elinor (O'Brien) Wiltshire for correspondence about a book incorrectly attributed to Miss O'Brien; and special thanks to Julian Reynolds and the referee for many helpful comments on the manuscript.

References

- Allen, D.E. 2009. C. Parkinson – a mystery Wight botanist identified. *Proceedings of the Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society*. 24: 103-104.
- Bentham, G. 1865. *Handbook of the British Flora*. London: Lovell Reeve & Co. [With illustrations]
- Britten, J. & Boulger, G.S. 1931. *A Biographical Index of Deceased British and Irish Botanists*. Second edition. London: Taylor & Francis. [Containing incorrect information about Charlotte Grace O'Brien]
- Colgan, N. 1904. *Flora of the County Dublin*. Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co.
- Colgan, N. & Scully, R.W. 1898. *Contributions towards a Cybele Hibernica*. 2nd. edition. Dublin: Edward Ponsonby.
- Davis, R. 1998. *Revolutionary Imperialist – William Smith O'Brien*. Dublin: The Lilliput Press.
- Desmond, R. 1977. *Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturists*. London: Taylor & Francis Ltd. [Containing incorrect information about Charlotte Grace O'Brien]

- Fitch, W.H. & Smith, W.G. 1887. *Illustrations of the British Flora*. London: L. Reeve & Co.
- Gwynn, S. 1909. *Charlotte Grace O'Brien. Selections from her writings and correspondence with a Memoir*. Dublin: Maunsel & Co. Ltd.
- Johnson, C. 1861. *The Grasses of Great Britain*. Illustrated by John E. Sowerby. London: John E. Sowerby and William Kent & Co.
- Knowles, M.C. 1903. Notes on some additions to the flora of County Limerick. *Irish Naturalist* 12:249-253.
- Knowles, M.C. 1904. A list of the Irish Fumitories in the herbarium of the National Museum, Dublin. *Irish Naturalist* 13:33-36.
- Knowles, M.C. 1905. *Atropis foucaudi* in Ireland. *Irish Naturalist* 14:51-53.
- Knowles, M.C. 1906. *Glyceria festucaeformis* in Co. Limerick. *Irish Naturalist* 15:279-280.
- Knowles, M.C. & O'Brien, C.G. 1907. The Flora of the Barony of Shanid. *Irish Naturalist* 16:185-201.
- Moore, D. & More, A.G. 1866. *Contributions towards a Cybele Hibernica*. Dublin: Hodges, Smith & Co.
- O'Brien, C. & Parkinson, C. 1881. *Wild Flowers of the Undercliff, Isle of Wight*. London: L. Reeve & Co. [This work has been wrongly attributed to Charlotte Grace O'Brien; see Appendix 1]
- O'Brien, C.G. 1878. *Light and Shade*. London: C. Kegan Paul & Co. [In two volumes]
- O'Brien, C.G. (undated) *Cahirmoyle or The Old Home*. [Privately printed in early 1880s?]
- O'Brien, C.G. 1886. *Lyrics*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.
- O'Brien, C.G. 1909. The making of our home (Sixth Article). *Irish Gardening* 4, No. 40:82-83.
- Praeger, R.L. 1901. Irish Topographical Botany. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*. Third Series 7:1-410.
- Praeger, R.L. 1903. Additions to "Irish Topographical Botany" in 1902. *Irish Naturalist* 12:23-40.
- Praeger, R.L. 1906. Irish Topographical Botany: supplement 1901-1905. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 26B:13-45.
- Praeger, R.L. 1908. Additions to "Irish Topographical Botany" in 1906-1907. *Irish Naturalist* 17:28-37.
- Praeger, R.L. 1909. *A tourist's Flora of the West of Ireland*. Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co.
- Praeger, R.L. 1934. *The Botanist in Ireland*. Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co.
- Preston, C.D., Pearman, D.A. & Dines, T.D. 2002. *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reynolds, S.C.P. 2002. *A Catalogue of Alien Plants in Ireland*. Occasional Papers No. 14. Glasnevin, Dublin: National Botanic Gardens.
- Reynolds, S.C.P. 2006. Flora of Sturamus Island, Co. Limerick (H8), and the taxonomic history of tussock-forming *Puccinellia maritima* (Huds.) Parl. (Poaceae) in Ireland. *Irish Naturalists' Journal* 28:192-199.
- Reynolds, S.C.P. 2013. *Flora of County Limerick*. Glasnevin, Dublin: National Botanic Gardens.
- Reynolds, S.C.P. & Scannell, M.J.P. 1992a. Herbarium of the Limerick Field Club (LIMFC): catalogue and history. Occasional Papers No. 7:1-39. Glasnevin,

- Dublin: National Botanic Gardens. [A number of records were clarified before citation in Reynolds (2013)]
- Reynolds, S.C.P. & Scannell, M.J.P. 1992b. A history of the Limerick Naturalists' Field Club, 1892-1913. *Irish Naturalists' Journal* 24:101-106.
- Stroh, P.A., Walker, K.J., Humphrey, T.A., Prescott, O.L. & Burkmar, R.J. 2023. *Plant Atlas 2020*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Syme, J.T.B. ed. (several editions, mainly 1800s) *English Botany or Coloured Figures of British Plants*. The figures by Sowerby, Sowerby, Salter and John E. Sowerby. London: Robert Hardwicke. [Best known as *Sowerby's English Botany*]
- Wood, J.G. 1859. *The Illustrated Natural History*. Volume 1 Class Mammalia. London: Routledge, Warne and Routledge. [Volume 2 (1862) Birds and Volume 3 (1863) Reptiles]
- Wyse Jackson, P. 2014. *Ireland's Generous Nature. The past and present uses of wild plants in Ireland*. St Louis, MO.: Missouri Botanical Garden.

Copyright retained by author(s). Published by BSBI under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

ISSN: 2632-4970

<https://doi.org/10.33928/bib.2025.07.010>

Appendix 1: *Wild Flowers of the Undercliff, Isle of Wight (1881)*, wrongly attributed

In 1987, attention was drawn to this author by Miss Maura Scannell of the National Botanic Gardens in Dublin that there was a book supposedly by Charlotte Grace O'Brien titled *Wild Flowers of the Undercliff, Isle of Wight* and dated 1881. The source was an entry for 'O'Brien, Charlotte Grace (1845-1909)' in Britten and Boulger's (1931) second edition of *A Biographical Index of Deceased British and Irish Botanists*, including that the book was illustrated by 'Miss C. Parkinson'. A similar entry was repeated in Desmond's (1977) *Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturists*, both also correctly mentioning Charlotte's 'Flora of Barony of Shanid' with M.C. Knowles (1907) and Gwynn's (1909) *Memoir*. Initially it was considered plausible because of her interest in plants, but there was no family knowledge of that book on wild flowers, nor indeed of Charlotte ever going to the Isle of Wight.

The title page of *Wild Flowers* reads as follows: 'Wild Flowers of the Undercliff, Isle of Wight. By Charlotte O'Brien and C. Parkinson, F.G.S.', and the Preface ascribes the coloured drawings to a Miss Parkinson. An obituary for Cyril Parkinson, Fellow of the Geological Society [of London] was traced, in which his collaboration on a handbook of 'marine algae' (in error for 'wild flowers?') with 'Mrs O'Brien of Ventnor' on the Isle of Wight was noted (pers. comm. Elinor (O'Brien) Wiltshire, 1987). It confirmed that there had been confusion between two Charlotte O'Briens in the original entry in Britten and Boulger's *Biographical Index*. Despite enquiries, little is known about the first author of *Wild Flowers*, Mrs Charlotte O'Brien, and apparently Miss Parkinson was Cyril Parkinson's sister (Allen, 2009). The error attributing this book to Charlotte Grace O'Brien persists online.