



Section from ground level to a depth of 45.5 feet (14 metres) at Timahoe, Co. Kildare, as visualised in Richard Griffith's 1810 report on the Bog of Allen East (NLI, MS 309). The section is divided into eleven bands, described in the *First report*, pp 53–5, of varied thickness and distinctive composition. The fifth band, three feet thick (90 centimetres), is described as containing blackish-brown fibres of moss 'barely perceptible' with numerous twigs and small branches of birch, alder, and fir. The three deepest bands, coloured yellowish-white and blue-grey, lie beneath the bog and consist of a progression from marl to clay and limestone gravel.

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO
THE BOGS COMMISSIONERS
1809–1813

Edited by
ARNOLD HORNER



IRISH MANUSCRIPTS COMMISSION

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Acknowledgement is also due to University College Dublin who supported this work in several ways, including by awarding the author a President's Research Fellowship to work on the project during 2004–5. Particular thanks is due to the School of Geography, especially Stephen Hannon, who drew Figure 1 and who made material available in the map library. Thanks are also due to the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences who in 2005 provided a small research grant to facilitate travel to repositories and the copying of materials.

LIST OF BOGS COMMISSIONERS, 1809–1813

HB	Hans Blackwood
JLF	John Leslie Foster
WG	William Gore
RG	Richard Griffith (senior)
HH	Henry Hamilton
TDH	Revd Thomas Dix Hincks
SOM	Sir Samuel O'Malley
JSR	John Staunton Rochfort
CV	General Charles Vallancey (d. 1812)

LIST OF DISTRICT ENGINEERS, 1809–1813

David Aher
Richard Brassington
Thomas Colbourne
Richard Lovell Edgeworth
Richard Griffith (junior)
J. Alex Jones
William Larkin (never active)
John Longfield
Alexander Nimmo
Thomas Townshend

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PREFACE

This volume is an attempt to describe and collate the large body of documents associated with the government-appointed commissioners who were in September 1809 tasked to enquire ‘into the nature and extent of the several bogs in Ireland, and the practicability of draining and cultivating them, and the best means of effecting the same’. Operating until December 1813, the commissioners had the prescience in their final act to donate many of their working materials, most notably the manuscript reports and many of the fine manuscript maps and diagrams prepared by their engineers, for preservation in the Dublin Society (the Royal Dublin Society from 1820), whose library later became a nucleus for the National Library of Ireland. Other material relating to the commissioners is preserved elsewhere, particularly in the National Archives of Ireland, where the minute book of the commissioners is now located, and among the Foster papers in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

The records associated with the commissioners offer insights to various aspects of early nineteenth-century Ireland, particularly its administration and the countryside. The district reports and the associated maps provide much local, and on occasion unique, detail. While much of this material was published in parliamentary reports, other elements, most notably the minute book, have remained in manuscript. The present volume seeks to make this diverse material sufficiently accessible to allow its potential significance to be appreciated better. A particular effort has been made to present the minute book, recording the transactions of the commissioners over four and a half years, and also to highlight the content and interest of the manuscript maps and other documents that are in the National Library of Ireland.

The maps record the broad features of local landscapes in some detail, but their usage has been circumscribed by (in some instances) their condition and their size. Some maps extend to over three metres in width and to over two metres in height, rendering both their preservation and presentation difficult. To reproduce them in full would be a major project. The aim in this volume is more limited: to provide a series of extracts which will allow an appreciation of why the maps of the bogs commissioners are a significant part of Ireland’s documentary heritage.

The present volume is the outcome of work that has been carried on intermittently for over a decade, and could not have been produced without the support, assistance and interest of a range of organisations and individuals. In the early stages, a President’s research fellowship from University College Dublin and a small research grant from the then Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences provided an important stimulus. Much essential help was provided by family

members, in particular my wife Margaret, who accompanied me on many field expeditions, and my daughter Katy, who undertook, with great care and also great good humour, a very exacting transcription of the minute book during the summer of 2005. As always, I owe a special debt to them and also to John Andrews, who encouraged my interest in the bogs commissioners and their maps, and who also introduced me to critical references. Others who have given support or information at various stages include Michael Byrne, David Dickson, Gerard Whelan and some of my former colleagues at University College Dublin. Throughout the project I have been privileged to have had the interest and unfailing and cheerful help of staff in the National Library of Ireland, the National Archives of Ireland, and at The National Archives, Kew (TNA): Tom Desmond, Brian Donnelly, Frances McGee and Colette O'Daly are just some of the many who have helped. Special thanks are also due to the staff of the Irish Manuscripts Commission, in particular James McGuire and Cathy Hayes, for the interest and care they have given to the final generation of this work in book form.

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INTRODUCTION

In operation between 1809 and 1813, the Bogs Commissioners were a government-appointed body given the task of appraising the development potential of the bogs of Ireland. In fulfilment of their remit, they organised a series of district surveys with reports and maps that embody an exceptional range of detail on a major feature of the Irish landscape. In the two centuries since elapsed, the bogs of Ireland have changed greatly as a result of extensive drainage and reclamation. The continuing interest of the early scientific work of the Bogs Commissioners lies in the extent of these changes and in the survival of so many of their records, manuscript as well as printed, which can feed into local and national studies of environmental change. The maps, especially, also contain much incidental topographical information (e.g. outline town plans, detail on demesnes, communications and rural settlement) that is of economic and social interest. The records associated with the Bogs Commissioners collectively constitute an important witness to the operation and implementation of a very specific piece of early nineteenth-century government policy and administration. NAI, Private Accession 1137/77 (Purser Griffith collection), the main text presented here,¹ is a minute book recording summary detail from the 145 meetings held by the nine commissioners over a fifty-two month period. Although punctuated by ‘silences’ concerning some of their decisions, discussions and activities, this book charts much of the planning, operationalisation, aspirations and limitations of the work of the commissioners. Its text is followed here by a series of appendices which identify and offer commentary on some of the other principal documents and records linked to the commissioners.

THE FORMATION OF THE BOGS COMMISSIONERS

On 15 June 1809, an act (49 Geo. III, chap. 102) was passed at Westminster providing for the appointment of commissioners to enquire into and examine, until 1 August 1811, ‘the nature and extent of the several bogs in Ireland, and the practicability of draining and cultivating them, and the best means of effecting the same’. Three months later, on 15 September 1809, the lord lieutenant of Ireland gave effect to the act by issuing a warrant nominating nine commissioners headed by the octogenarian former military engineer and eminent antiquarian General Charles Vallancey (1726–1812) (see Plate 2). The commissioners, who are considered further below, held their first meeting four days later, on 19 September 1809.

¹ The volume is also available on microfilm (NAI, MFP 9/1). The text was transcribed by Katy Horner, with the assistance of Arnold Horner. Particular thanks are due to the staffs of the National Archives of Ireland and of the National Library of Ireland for their unfailing help during the execution of the present work.

The creation of the commissioners was the outcome of an exceptional coalition of interests in Ireland and Britain during the early 1800s. Within Ireland, there had been a long-standing, if intermittent, intellectual interest in the drainage and reclamation of the boglands which extended across up to one-seventh of the country.² That interest was also to the fore in the mind of one of the leading politicians of the day, the former speaker of the Irish House of Commons and from 1806 to 1811 the chancellor of the Irish exchequer, John Foster (1740–1828) of Collon, Co. Louth.³ A master of the political scene and adept at exerting influence and manipulating appointments, Foster had a long-standing interest in the development of the linen industry in Ireland and in the cultivation of the raw materials, flax and hemp. Among his other concerns were the improvement of agriculture and bog drainage. In the vast surviving collections of his personal papers, over thirty items have been directly catalogued to the themes of bog-land and drainage improvement,⁴ the two earliest of which are the ‘heads’ of parliamentary bill proposals formulated in the 1750s. Referring in 1801 to his early aspirations, Foster recalled how, at some (undated) stage, he was preparing a general bill

for reclaiming our bogs.... But the popery question and the rebellion prevented any hope of its being properly attended to.... Every bog here is full of oak or deal timber. Why not expect the same trees again to thrive? Rape, hemp, cabbage and turnips would depart from the more valuable tillage lands into them. Potatoes would find an easier cultivation and require less manure. All these and many other ideas for the improvement of this kingdom occupied my mind for years, and some I brought forward and succeeded in.⁵

Clearly demonstrating the pivotal role he must have played, Foster’s records contain copies of much of the key correspondence and documents relating to the lead-up to, and early operation of, the bogs commissioners during 1809. A few later records, with proposals for bog-land improvement and drainage from around 1820, suggest that his interest in reclamation and improvement continued long after his formal political retirement in 1811.

From 1801 the statistical surveys of Irish counties published by the Dublin Society provided a new, intensive focus for many of the improvement issues that concerned Foster. The survey of King’s County by Sir Charles Coote in 1801 recorded how Foster and the trustees of the linen manufacture were seeking to promote the growing of the hemp used in the development of sail cloth manufacturing, adding that hemp ‘succeeds admirably in drained bog manured with ashes.’⁶ Reproduced too was a letter from the

² For general context on the extent and development of Irish bogs see Feehan and O’Donovan, *Bogs*. Early expressions of interest in bogs include William King, ‘Of the bogs and loughs of Ireland’, *Phil. Trans. R. Soc.*, 15 (1685), pp 948–60; see also Henry Brooke, *A brief essay on the nature of bogs, and the method of reclaiming them. humbly addressed to the Right Honourable and Honourable The Dublin Society* (Dublin, 1772).

³ A. P. W. Malcomson, *John Foster (1740–1828): the politics of improvement and prosperity* (Dublin, 2011), hereafter cited as Malcomson, *John Foster (1740–1828)*.

⁴ PRONI, D562/7990–8023. While this is the sequence directly related to bogs and drainage, records in other parts of the Foster papers also touch on these themes.

⁵ Foster to earl of Sheffield, 17 May 1801 in *An Anglo-Irish dialogue: a calendar of the correspondence between John Foster and [John Baker Holroyd] Lord Sheffield, 1774–1821*, ed. A. P. W. Malcomson (Belfast, 1975), p. 40; see also Malcomson, *John Foster (1740–1828)*, p. 276.

⁶ Charles Coote, *General view of the agriculture and manufactures of the King’s County* (Dublin, 1801), p. 217.

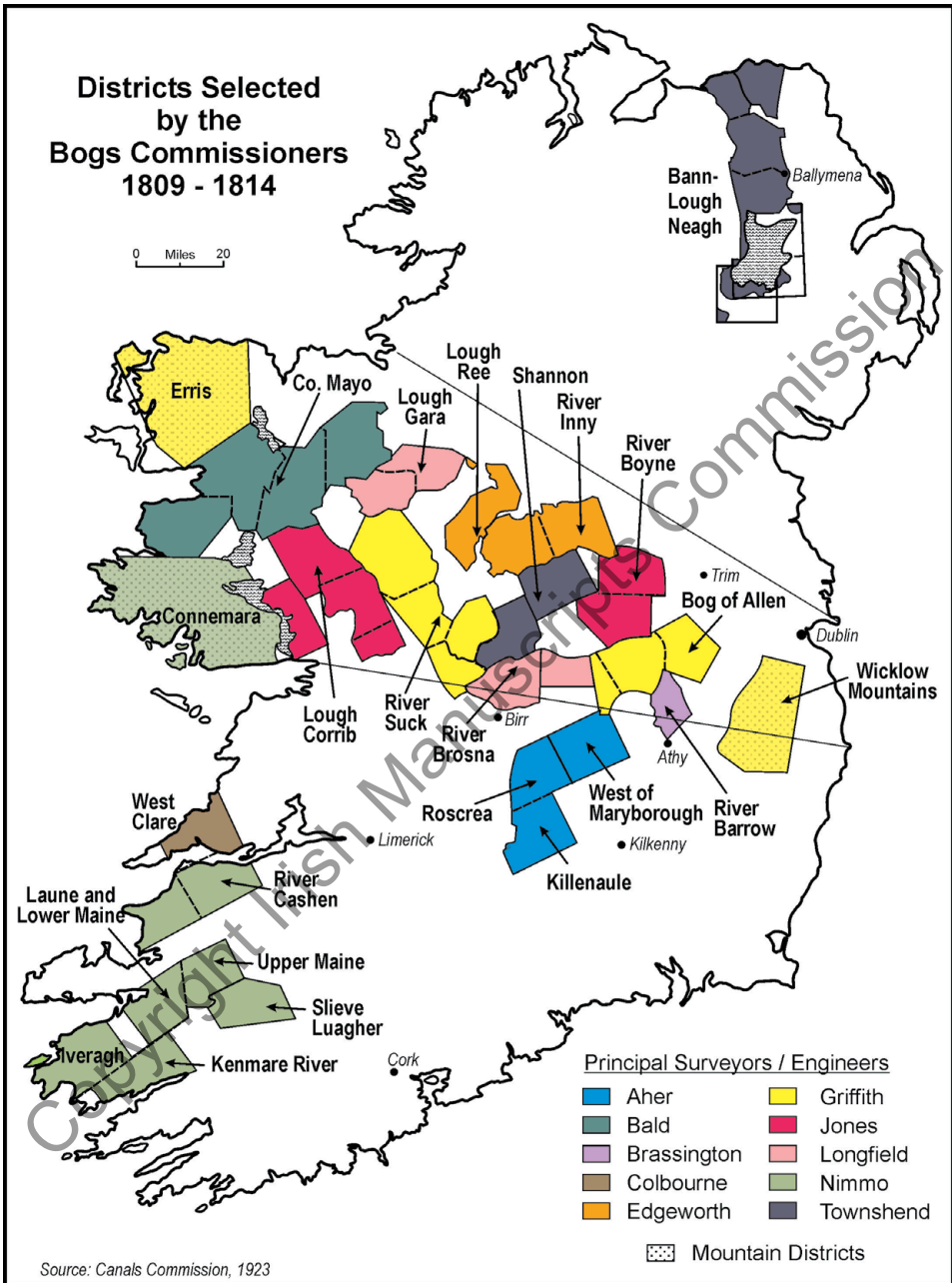


Figure 1. Districts included in surveys by the bogs commissioners 1809–13. Map compiled by Stephen Hannon. A version of this map appeared in *History Ireland*, 13 (2005), no. 5.



Plate 2. General Charles Vallancey (c. 1726–1812), engineer, surveyor, antiquarian, founder member of the Royal Irish Academy, active member of the Dublin Society, and chairman of the Bogs Commissioners, 1809–12 (image courtesy of Royal Irish Academy).

MINUTE BOOK OF THE
COMMISSIONERS FOR
THE IMPROVEMENT OF BOGS
IN IRELAND, 1809–1813

NAI, PRIVATE ACCESSION 1137/77

(PURSER GRIFFITH COLLECTION)

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BY THE LORD LIEUTENANT GENERAL AND GENERAL GOVERNOR OF IRELAND¹

Whereas by an Act passed in the last Session of Parliament entitled 'an Act to appoint Commissioners to enquire and examine, until the first Day of August 1811, into the Nature and Extent of the several Bogs in Ireland, and the Practicability of draining and cultivating them, and the best means of effecting the same', it is enacted That any Persons, not exceeding in the whole the number of nine Persons, who shall be nominated and appointed by The Lord Lieutenant or other Chief Governor or Governors of Ireland for the time being by writing under the Hand or Hands of such Lord Lieutenant or other Chief Governors or Governors, to be Commissioners for the Execution of the said Act, shall be and they are thereby appointed to be Commissioners for the purposes in said Act mentioned. We do therefore hereby nominate and appoint General Charles Vallancey, The Honorable Hans Blackwood, Sir Samuel O'Malley, Baronet, Reverend Thomas Dix Hincks, John Leslie Foster, John Staunton Rochfort, William Gore, Richard Griffith and Henry Hamilton Esquires to be Commissioners for the execution of the Act aforesaid. Given at His Majesty's Castle of Dublin the 15th Day of September 1809

By His Grace's Command
Robt Dundas²

Ent in the Office of His Majesty's
Auditor General 4th October 1809³

Commissioners to enquire and examine
into the nature and extent of the
several Bogs in Ireland &c

¹ The volume starts with two blank pages followed by an insert of four sides (the last two blank) with the warrant, dated 15 Sept. 1809, of Robert Dundas, chief secretary for Ireland, appointing commissioners until Aug. 1811: 'ent. in the Office of His Majesty's Auditor General 4th October 1809'.

² Robert Dundas (1771–1851), later 2nd Viscount Melville, chief secretary for Ireland, Apr.–Sept. 1809.

³ This statement has been pasted in and has near the top of the first page the word 'Richard's' – perhaps suggesting that this particular volume may have been a copy for either Richard Griffith senior, the commissioner, or his son Richard Griffith junior, the engineer.

TUESDAY 19TH SEPTEMBER 1809

Present: CV, HB, JLF, RG, SOM, JSR, WG⁴

Pursuant to the annexed Warrant, the following Commissioners named therein met, viz

General Charles Vallancey in the Chair

Honbe. Hans Blackwood	Sir Samuel O'Malley Bart
John Leslie Foster Esqr.	John Staunton Rochfort Esqr.
Richard Griffith Esqr.	William Gore Esqr.

Having taken the Oath prescribed by the Act, came to the following Resolutions.

Resolved That a Secretary be appointed, who shall take down the minutes of their proceedings, issue Summons for their meetings, keep their Accounts and conduct their correspondence with Surveyors and others under the direction of the Board.

Resolved That the Secretary be allowed a Salary of Two Hundred Pounds per Annum.

Resolved That the Money granted to the Commissioners be lodged to their Credit, in the Bank of Ireland, payable to the order of any Four Commissioners, agreeable to said Act.

Resolved That the Secretary do pay all Bills under the Sum of Ten Pounds, the same being first approved by the Board and that all Bills above the Sum of Ten Pounds, be paid by an order of Four Commissioners, on the Bank of Ireland specifying the services for which the said Sums were drawn.

Resolved That Bucknall McCarthy Esqr. Assistant Secretary to the Dublin Society be appointed Secretary to the Board.

Resolved That it appears to the Board, that the House⁵ of the Dublin Society, will be most convenient for this Board to meet in, and that an application be made to the Society this day for that purpose. And then the Board adjourned for one Hour.⁶

The Commissioners having obtained the permission of the Dublin Society to use their Apartments for the purpose of their meetings met, then pursuant to their adjournment, B. McCarthy being appointed their Secretary was brought in and Sworn pursuant to the Act to his true and faithful demeanour in his Office.

And then the Board adjourned till tomorrow.

Ch Vallancey in Chair

⁴ For full identification of commissioners, see introduction.

⁵ Clause 6 of the Bogs act provided for the Dublin Society premises, then at Hawkins Street, to be used by the commissioners.

⁶ The adjournment presumably allowed time for the extraordinary meeting of the Dublin Society which is noted as having been held on 19 Sept. 1809. At this meeting, attended by just eleven members (including four of the new commissioners), approval was given to the commissioners' request to use the Dublin Society's premises (*Proceedings of the Dublin Society*, 45, 1808–9, pp 183–4). As noted in the introduction, the use of the Dublin Society house and the appointment of McCarthy had already been anticipated by John Foster in a letter to Charles Saxton on 27 July 1809 (PRONI, D562/10875).

WEDNESDAY 20TH SEPTEMBER 1809

Present: CV, HB, SOM, JLF, RG, WG, JSR

Resolved That the Secretary do write to the Royal Canal Company to request that they will permit their Engineers M[essr]s Jones⁷ and Towns[h]end⁸ to attend this Board to give such information as they may require with respect to levels and Surveys, and to know whether this Board may employ M[essr]s Jones and Townsend in levelling and surveying such Bogs as may approximate to their Navigation.

and then the board adjourned till tomorrow

Ch Vallancey in the Chair

THURSDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER 1809

Present: CV, SOM, JSR, WG, JLF, RG

The following agreement was made between the Board and Mr Larkin⁹ Surveyor.

(Copy) Mr Larkin proposes to furnish the Commissioners for the improvement of the Bogs in Ireland, with a Trigonometrical skeleton Map of the King's County, exhibiting all the Bogs of the County with the high ground connected with them, and the Towns Roads Rivers Lakes & Canals of said County, drawn on a scale of Four Inches to an Irish Mile, and the contents of each Bog in Irish Plantation Acres marked accurately upon it, so as to give complete working plans of the County above mentioned on which their Engineers might accurately mark the Levels taken by them under their Instructions for the purposes of drainage and navigation, & roads agreeably to the detailed plan shown to him for their guidance in these. The above he proposes to furnish the Commissioners for Sum of Three Hundred Pounds. With this proposal the Commissioners have closed, and Mr Larkin undertakes to furnish this Map in about Two Months.

Signed by me on behalf of the Commissioners and
by their order this 21st day of September 1809.

B McCarthy
William Larkin

and then the board adjourned till tomorrow

Ch Vallancey in the Chair

⁷ John [or James] Alex Jones (*fl.* 1800–1815), assistant engineer with the Grand Canal Company in 1802–3, assistant engineer, later resident engineer with the Royal Canal Company, 1808–14 (salary £500 p.a. in 1809–10).

⁸ Thomas Towns[h]end (*c.* 1771–1846) engaged on various canal surveys in Ireland, including with the Royal Canal Company, 1802–12, and was later engineer for part of the Birmingham canal system (Skempton, pp 712–14)

⁹ William Larkin (*fl.* 1800–1821), post roads surveyor and engineer, maker of county maps for the grand juries of twelve or more Irish counties. The map described here is now NAI, OPW 3/1/1/2.

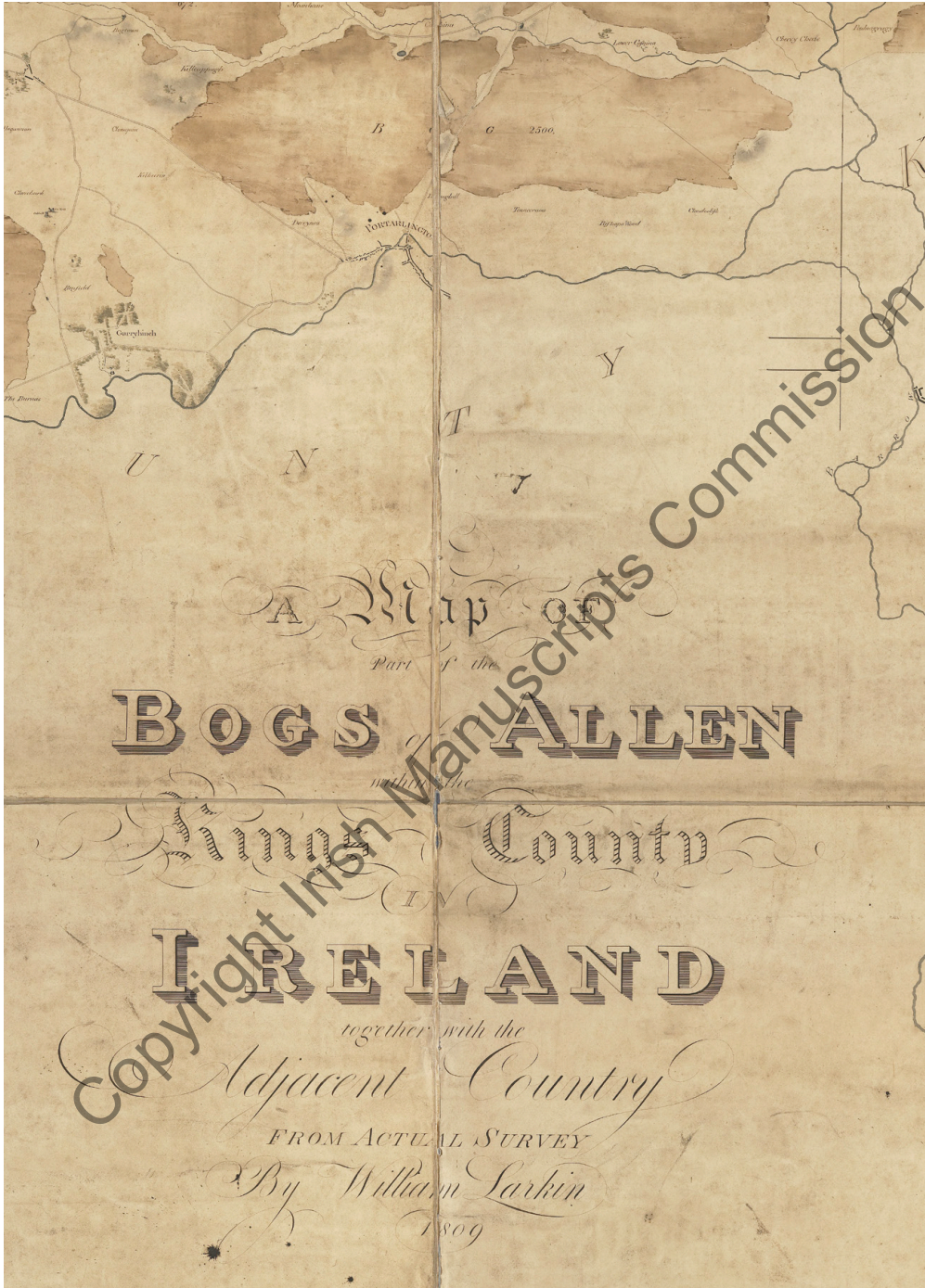


Plate 3. A small section of the huge map (3560 x 2270 mm) of King's County produced by William Larkin in response to the agreement made with the Bogs Commissioners on 21 September 1809 (NAI, OPW 3/1/1/2). Larkin was paid £300 as agreed on 20 December 1809. The full map is reproduced in the endpapers to this edition.

FRIDAY, SEPT 22 1809

Present: CV, RG, SOM, WG, JLF

Resolved That the Secretary do apply in the proper form, for such part of the Parliamentary Grant, as His Grace may be pleased to order.

and then the board adjourned till tomorrow

Ch Vallancey in the chair

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 23 1809

Present: CV, SOM, JLF, WG, JSR, RG

The Letters from the following Engineers offering their services were presented and read...viz. Richard Griffith Jr Esqr,¹⁰ R. L. Edgeworth Esqr,¹¹ Thomas Sherrard Esqr,¹² Hill Clements Esqr,¹³ William Larkin Esqr, and [blank] Ball Esqr.¹⁴

Resolved That the same do lie on the Table to be taken into further consideration.

Resolved That the Secretary do apply to the Lord Lieutenant for liberty for the Commissioners to have for inspection General Vallanceys general map of Ireland and his Military Map of the South.¹⁵

Resolved That the Sum of Fifty Guineas per Annum be allowed to Mr P T Wilson¹⁶ as a copying Clerk in the Secretarys Office and for his attendance on the Board.

Mr Larkin sent in to the Board the following proposal which being read as follows

- ¹⁰ Richard Griffith junior (1784–1878), geologist, roads engineer and later co-ordinator of the valuation of Ireland, was son of the bogs commissioner, Richard Griffith senior (1752–1820).
- ¹¹ Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1749–1817) of Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, polymath inventor and writer. In May 1809, when the Bogs commission was anticipated, Edgeworth had expressed his preference for being ‘something better than a sleeping partner’ – an engineer not a commissioner: R. L. Edgeworth to John Foster, 21 May 1809 (PRONI, D207/32/5).
- ¹² Thomas Sherrard (c. 1750–1837), leading Dublin land surveyor, secretary of the Wide Streets Commission, 1789–1833; see Andrews, *Plantation acres*, pp 278–84.
- ¹³ Hill Clements (*fl.* 1809–1824), later, with David Aher, author of a grand jury map of Co. Kilkenny, 1812–24. He is profiled further in J. H. Andrews, ‘David Aher and Hill Clements’ map of county Kilkenny’ in William Nolan and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Kilkenny: history and society* (Dublin, 1990), pp 437–63.
- ¹⁴ *Recte* William Bald (1789–1857), Scottish-born surveyor and roads engineer, who worked intermittently on a twenty-seven sheet grand jury-commissioned map of Co. Mayo, c. 1808–30; see Arnold Horner, ‘Representing the physical and settlement topography of County Mayo in the early nineteenth century: the mapping and modelling of William Bald’ in G. Moran and N. Ó Muraile, *Mayo: history and society* (Dublin, 2014), pp 361–92; Margaret C. Storrie, ‘William Bald, F.R.S.E., c. 1789–1857: surveyor, cartographer and civil engineer’ in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, no. 47 (Sept. 1969), pp 205–31; see also *DIB*.
- ¹⁵ B. McCarthy to Sir Charles Saxton, 25 Sept. 1809 (NAI, OP/284/20). The various maps of Ireland compiled by Vallancey are reviewed by J. H. Andrews in *Shapes of Ireland* (Dublin, 1997), esp. pp 250–60; see also J. H. Andrews, ‘Charles Vallancey and the map of Ireland’ in *Geographical Journal*, cxxxii (1966), pp 48–61, and cxlvi (1980), p. 150.
- ¹⁶ Peter Theodore Wilson (1780–1853), housekeeper (i.e. manager) at the premises of the Dublin Society from July 1807, registrar from 1819.