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052102014X - The Personality of Ireland: Habitat, Heritage and History

E. Estyn Evans

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THE WILES LECTURES  
GIVEN AT THE QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

THE PERSONALITY OF IRELAND

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*The personality of Ireland*  
HABITAT, HERITAGE AND HISTORY

E. ESTYN EVANS

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QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, BELFAST

CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1973

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521086844](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521086844)

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First published 1973  
This digitally printed first paperback version 2005

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 72-83667*

ISBN-13 978-0-521-08684-4 hardback  
ISBN-10 0-521-08684-1 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02014-5 paperback  
ISBN-10 0-521-02014-X paperback

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## Preface

The purpose of the Wiles Lectures, which are given annually in the Queens' University of Belfast – normally by a distinguished historian – is 'to promote the study of the history of civilisation and to encourage the extension of historical thinking into the realm of general ideas'. It may be thought presumptuous for a geographer, although by definition he is concerned with the whole wide world, to attempt to make a contribution to such a lofty theme: my excuse must be that I was invited to do so. I accepted the challenge willingly if rashly, and I wish to express my deep gratitude to Mrs J. Boyd and the Trustees of the Wiles Foundation, to Dr A. Vick, Vice-Chancellor of the University, through whom the invitation came, and to Professor M. Roberts who gave me guidance and encouragement and to whom it fell to make arrangements for the lectures under difficult circumstances. I wish also to record my gratitude to the Queen's University for facilitating my retirement, after a term of forty years, from the headship of a large department two years before my time by giving me a personal chair and transferring me to the Directorship of the newly-established Institute of Irish Studies. On my retirement in 1970, moreover, I was generously offered a Senior Fellowship in the Institute, and concurrently (1970–72) I have enjoyed a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship which has enabled me to travel and pursue my interests throughout Ireland and in several parts of Atlantic Europe.

In addition to colleagues from several departments of the University who attended the discussions which follow each of the four lectures, several scholars came on invitation, under the terms of the Trust, from other universities and learned institutions: Professor D. Greene, Professor Jones Hughes and Dr A.T. Lucas from Dublin; Professor E. Jones and Dr. J. Johnson from London; Professor J. Mogeey from Boston (via Oxford), Professor D. Quinn from Liverpool and Mr. G. Thompson and Dr A. Gailey from the Ulster Folk Museum. I am grateful to them for their contributions to the discussions and for the helpful correspondence I have had with them since.

I have come into the historical field in a literal sense, through work in the field, and have no claim to be called an historian except in the most general sense. I have approached the subject in the spirit of Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel, looking on cultural landscapes as having patterns which are woven into the history of man. Evangelical conservationists and anti-pollutionists are receiving so much publicity nowadays that

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## PREFACE

'environment' is coming to be narrowly conceived as the special concern of ecologists, planners and politicians. As a cultural geographer, I see it as part of human history. I have not served the exacting apprenticeship required of historical scholars, and cannot claim to have made any contribution to many of the special problems which preoccupy Irish historians. On the other hand I have ventured to explore some wider fields and have drawn freely on the findings of scholars in several related disciplines. I must ask for forgiveness if, in attempting to assess their contributions to our knowledge of the Irish cultural landscape, I have oversimplified or misinterpreted those findings. I have tried to take account, within the limits of my competence, of different sorts of evidence bearing on the history of Ireland and its peoples in the hope of demonstrating that co-operation between research workers can lead to fuller understanding.

I have expanded the lectures here and there for publication but otherwise have left them in the intentionally somewhat provocative form in which they were delivered. To the four chapters I have added as an appendix a remarkable account of agrarian conditions in County Donegal in the years before the Great Famine, first published in 1845.

I wish to offer my thanks to the following for their help in selecting and preparing the illustrations and in other ways: Dr R. Common, Miss E. Duncan, Mr D. Evans, Mr W.F. Little, Dr D. McCourt, Mr N.C. Mitchel, Dr J.K. St Joseph and Mr J. Bambury; and to Mr P.L. Henry and Mrs M. Kennedy for bibliographical assistance.

The Institute of Irish Studies  
Queen's University  
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E. Estyn Evans  
10 February 1972