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Pennick’s of Delgany

An extract in a local directory dating from 1910 provides a snapshot about Pennick and Co. They were nurserymen, landscape gardeners, forest planters and valuers located at Delgany, Co. Wicklow and were contactable by telephone at 1 Greystones and by telegram “Pennick, Delgany”.

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Little is known about the origins of the nursery. A Mr. Michael Pennick had been gardener at nearby Bellevue, Co. Wicklow where he erected greenhouses in 1791 – 1792. An undated catalogue probably from the late 19th century of Pennicks, Delgany, Co. Wicklow, states that the nursery was established in 1820. The nursery was located 17 miles south of Dublin at an elevation of 400 feet within view of the sea near Greystones Co. Wicklow. The Griffith Valuation of 1852 records that Michael Pennick rented some six acres of land to the value of £20 and 46 acres of land with offices and house to value of £65 from Peter La Touche at Kindlestown Upper, Delgany, Co. Wicklow. A notice of Probate appeared in the Freeman’s Journal in May 1871 Michael Peter Pennick had died in December 1870 and Robert Hildrith Pennick was an executor.

From the early 1900’s the name Ireton Pennick Jones was associated with the company. Census returns for 1911 record that Jones was 37, his wife Ethel Jones was 28 and they had two daughters Olga and Rose Charlotte. His occupation was given as auctioneer.

A notice appeared in the Freeman’s Journal in 1872, Upper Kendalstown Nurseries, Delgany, Co. Wicklow The ‘stock of Forest Trees, Evergreens, Coniferae, Rhododendrons, Heaths &c. is unrivalled for health, beauty, and variety,’ Catalogues were issued on application. Catalogues dated 1894 – 1895, 1898 and later undated catalogues held in the Library, National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, provide information about the nursery. In the catalogue of 1894 a group of 12 men and three horses are shown in a fruit field. Mr. Thomas Chalmers late of the nursery firm Dickson’s was manager.

The earlier catalogues listed the names and prices of a comprehensive selection of fruit trees as well as a wide range of trees and shrubs, roses, alpines and herbaceous plants. Later catalogues ran to over 100 pages, were illustrated and provided concise descriptions of trees and shrubs. The company ran an advertisement in The Irish Times ‘Does any garden lover desire Pennick’s Picturesque catalogue?’ Illustrated catalogues included pictures of large Monkey Puzzle, Araucaria araucana, Palm Tree Cordyline australis and Stone Pine Pinus radiata. [see illustration in file] Of
the *Cordyline australis*, then uncommon, Pennick Jones wrote that one ‘carried 28 inflorescences ‘ which is quite unprecedented’ and a photograph of the tree was awarded First Prize by *Gardening Illustrated* an English gardening magazine of the period. The Monkey Puzzles were ‘so ornate with their pendulatory branches, that they doubted ‘if they are excelled in the Kingdom’ (i.e. Britain and Ireland). Among the other fine conifer specimens on the nursery were Stone Pine at 40ft with a 9ft girth, [see illustration in file] Cedar, *Cedrus atlantica* ‘Glauc’ 8ft wide and Italian Cypress *Cupressus sempervirens* ‘Fastigiata’ 40 ft. These trees must have been planted in the 1870s or 1880s. They also supplied a selection of recently introduced Himalayan rhododendron of which one was noted in the newspapers, *Rhododendron arboreum* had a 25ft spread with deep scarlet flowers. The nursery was grew Kowhai, *Sophora microphylla*, from New Zealand, then and now uncommon. Indicative of the interest in fruit gardens in the early 20th century, they supplied varieties of apples, pears, cherries, damsons, currants, figs, gooseberries, Japanese wineberry, nuts and filberts, raspberries, strawberries and loganberry.

The catalogues also advertised that the company undertook landscape gardening and that they sent ‘experienced men’ to undertake ‘job gardening’. They advertised ‘Landscape Gardening’ laying out of New and Renovating of Old Forest, Gardens and Park Planting The Formation of Planting of Rockeries, Waterfalls and Ornamental Lakes’.

**Notable Visits and Visitors**

As the cover of a catalogue illustrated [see illustration in file] the Nursery maintained display gardens, with conifer borders, herbaceous borders and fine specimen trees in their grounds.

The Nursery attracted visits from specialist groups whose accounts provide an insight into the many interesting large specimen plants growing on the site. In summer 1906 some 40 members of The Irish Gardeners’ Association, an organisation which organised lectures and visits for their members who were employed in nurseries, seed shops and private gardens. Mr Jones was President at that time.

A report in *Irish Gardening* described how members of the Association admired ivy-leaved pelargoniums and Marguerites growing in front gardens as they walked from Greystones train station to the nursery, where ‘everything betokened health and luxuriance of growth’. Fine flowering specimens of *Drimys winteri*, *Crinodendron hookerianum*, *Eucryphia glutinosa* all large growing South American shrubs and white flowering *Carpenteria californica*, notable specimen of Stone Pine *Pinus radiata*, both native to California. The visitors also noted the uncommon +*Laburnocytisus* ‘Adamii’ what is known as a graft hybrid, where a purple *Cytisus* (Broom) was
grafted into a branch of a yellow Laburnum. The resulting grafted tree is unusual, part hybrid with purple-yellow, part yellow Laburnum and part pale purple Broom. Their catalogue photograph of this 20ft tree was published in the Gardeners’ Chronicle in 1904.

In 1909 members of the Dublin Naturalists’ Field Club made a similar journey. As well as studying the exotic plants they examined the weeds of cultivation under the guidance of Mr Pennick Jones and David Houston of the Royal College of Science of Ireland.

Exhibiting trees and shrubs

In the early 20th century nurseries exhibited plants at Council meetings of the Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland. In May 1911 the nursery presented a ‘display of hardy nursery shrubs’, at an RHSI Council meeting and in August of that year some Mytus luma (now Luma apiculata). Pennick Jones must have been very proud of this shrub. In 1913 he sent a photograph and article to the Gardeners’ Chronicle the weekly trade journal, published in London, where he described it as a ‘Snowdrift when in flower in August and September and now richly decorated with black fruit’. The fruit was used to make jam. He considered that it deserved to be more widely grown. In the nursery catalogue it was ‘very rare’ in Ireland and at 20 ft high ‘acknowledged superb and unique’. [see illustration in file]

Pennick and Co. like other nurseries of the period mounted competitive displays at Flower Shows organised by the Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland in 1911, Terenure and District Horticultural Society, 1914, Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire) Flower Show held in the People’s Park in 1915 and 1917. While the company appeared to be in decline in the 1920s in August 1927 they were awarded a silver medal for Hardy Flowers at the RHSI Show.

In November and December 1922 they held auctions of fruit trees, roses, flowering shrubs, climbers, Christmas trees, pot plants at 11 South King Street under the ‘hammer’ of Arthur Jones, Delgany and Dublin, Auctioneer. Another notice referred to the sale of pergola poles, gooseberry bushes four years old at 13/6 delivered. In 1924 and 1928 they offered Cabbage and Cauliflower plants for sale, perhaps as a cash crop. The date of closure of the nursery is uncertain, but they advertised a clearance sale in March 1928 and in July of that year a cultivator and wooden mowing machine were for sale.

Pennick Jones and Arboriculture

A comment in an advertisement of 1921 read ‘Specimen trees for avenues and streets have been specially selected’. Ireton Pennick Jones had long maintained an interest in tree planting. In 1909
he wrote to the *Irish Times* requesting information about suitable sites for tree planting. He noted how ‘many squalid streets and neglected areas could with advantage be civilised with tree planting’. He deplored the lack of afforestation in the country and said that arboreal devastation was ‘a national calamity’. In 1909 correspondence with Bray Urban District Council Mr Ireton Jones was prepared to supply trees at half-price. He also offered a quantity of shrubs for planting on the Esplanade.

In a letter dating from 1922 to *The Irish Times* regarding trees on the Quinsborough Road, Bray, Pennick and Co. agreed that the tree selection was poor. They had grown *Ailanthus glandulosa* Chinese Tree of Heaven and acacias as street trees, but without success and would recommend Wych Elm, Sycamore and London Plane. Secondly they hoped that the new State would support tree planting in rural towns.

Pennick Jones also supported Arbor Day which was organised the Irish Forestry Society from 1904 – 1923. To mark Arbor Day, November 1916, standard apple trees donated by Pennick and Co. among others, were planted by students of the Irish College of Gardening for Women, Meane, Terenure, Dublin. A year later they were one of the companies who supplied Birch and Purple Beech trees for Arbor Day planting at Harold’s Cross Park, Dublin. Pennick and Co. must have supplied many gardens with many unusual trees and shrubs, however apart from Rowallane, Co. Down, no information about other customers has come to light. Some noble trees remain at Kendlestown, Delgany, the legacy of a fine nursery.

In 1923 an advertisement in the *Irish Times* read ‘An ideal motor trip To visit Pennick’s nursery at Delgany and select plants whilst in Bloom’. Those who made an excursion by train or motor car had much to see.

Illustrations from catalogues provided by the Library National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin and *Irish Gardening*.

Mary Forrest