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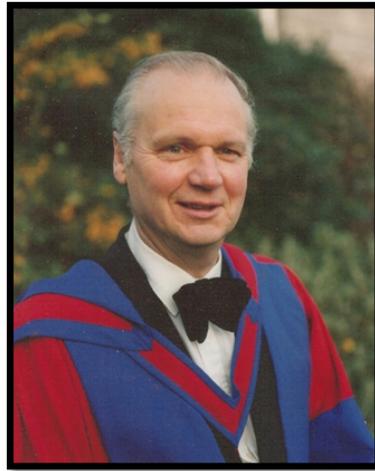
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Obituary: Fred Aalen, 1934-2015

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Fred Aalen¹

Died September 28th 2015.

Born February 28th 1934.

Fred (more formally F.H.A., or Frederick Herman Andreasen) Aalen (1934-2015) was for many years a prominent and much-liked figure in the world of Geography in Ireland. Born in Canada to a Norwegian father and to a mother with Norwegian antecedents, he was brought up in England where he attended Blyth Grammar School (Northumberland). Having briefly considered a future in art, he opted for Durham University, where he became president of the Union and in time a graduate in Geography. Survey work in Malta during a field trip with the legendary Professor Bill Fisher gave him an early appetite for the empirical field surveys he enjoyed throughout his professional life. Following a period as a British Council scholar at the University of Copenhagen, he came to Dublin in 1958 to be the fourth member of staff in the fledgling Trinity College department of Geography headed by Joe (later to become Professor Joe) Haughton. Over the next five decades, Fred made an impact on Irish life through his teaching and research on geography and planning in Ireland. Above all, he had an abiding interest in landscape, both the Irish landscape and the rural landscapes of other parts of Europe, most notably those of upland northern England and of the Mediterranean world. The broad-brush, inter-disciplinary and strongly field-oriented perspective of Professor Estyn Evans, then a doyen of geography in Ireland, was an important influence, with Fred finding a particular appeal in Evans's abiding interest in

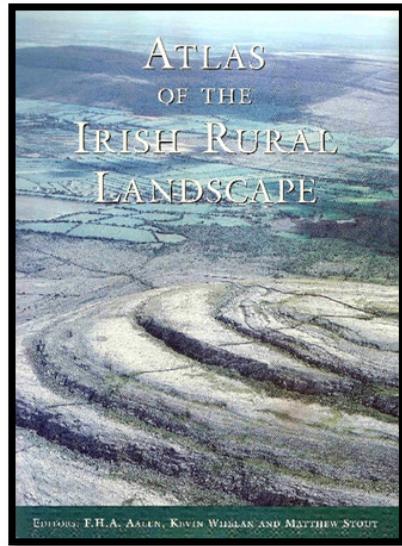
¹ The author thanks Bet Aalen and a number of Fred's colleagues for some of the information used in this text. The images of Fred are courtesy of Bet Aalen.

placing Ireland within the much broader cultural realm of Atlantic Europe. Fred's training equipped him to develop a particular concern for such matters as settlement morphology, field-systems and vernacular architecture. However, broader formative processes attracted him as much as form itself, with such topics as landscape evolution, and the innovation and diffusion of ideas and techniques, to the fore in both his teaching and research.

At Trinity, Fred's early work focused on the rural landscapes of north-western Zealand in Denmark, a study of which formed his M.Sc. thesis (1962). In Ireland, he began to explore historical aspects of rural settlement, and he published articles on the Cooley peninsula of north Louth and on transhumance in west Wicklow. During the 1960s, he pioneered an interest in planning issues in rural areas, heading Trinity College surveys on west Wicklow and on County Kildare. He foresaw the growing influence of Dublin on its surrounding city-region, and he wrote perceptively on the challenges posed for rural areas overwhelmed by metropolitan dominance. But his interests ranged widely, and he also found time to write a short book (1968) with the sociologist Hugh Brody on the last days of the Gola Island community in County Donegal. Soon after, he spent a year taking a diploma course in urban and regional planning at Edinburgh University. During the later 1960s and in the 1970s, he acted as an adviser for An Foras Forbartha, then the national institute for physical planning in Ireland. His planning interests extended to such matters as preparing a report for the Attorney-General of Ireland, in the early 1980s, on some of the offshore issues that might arise from the division of the continental shelf between Ireland and Britain. In later years, as well as generously continuing to produce book reviews for this and other journals, he wrote extensively on architecture and the landscape, exploring such varied topics as late-nineteenth century council houses in rural areas, the activities of the Iveagh Trust and other housing bodies in inner city Dublin, the representation of mythical islands on maps of the North Atlantic, and relationships between environmentalism and Christianity. His talent as illustrator was evident in numerous sketches of rural houses and in drawings of house plans. Abroad, he maintained a long-standing interest in Greek vernacular architecture, participating in and contributing to the Durham-Cambridge Boeotia village history project during the 1990s. So diverse and widely-scattered were his contributions that few of his colleagues may have appreciated the full range of his scholarship.

Fred's edited volumes include *Dublin: City and County – from prehistory to present* (1992, with Kevin Whelan), *The future of the Irish rural landscape* (1985) and *Landscape study and management* (1996). But the most extended syntheses of his Irish landscape work find expression in his highly-regarded *Man and the landscape in Ireland* (1978) and in the magnificent *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (1997, second edition 2011) which he co-edited with Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout. The latter book, bravely and expansively produced by Cork University Press after others had demurred, was a runaway success, selling over 20,000 copies. It remains the most authoritative statement yet compiled on the Irish landscape.

Fred muses over many issues in the reflective introductory chapter to the *Atlas*. Reviewing the making of the Irish landscape as a synthesis of habitat and history, he asserts (1997, p. 30) that ‘much of the landscape is truly vernacular, the product of evolving hybrid cultures coaxed or disciplined by the environment into recognisably Irish moulds’. But he also ponders on ‘a feeling that the rural landscape is not a genuinely Irish thing, but something irredeemably tainted by impoverishment, with colonial dispossession and landlord oppression; “a data bank of humiliation”’. He asks if such an outlook helps explain ‘the massive destruction of features such as demesnes, boreens and bogs and the energetic creation of new landscape



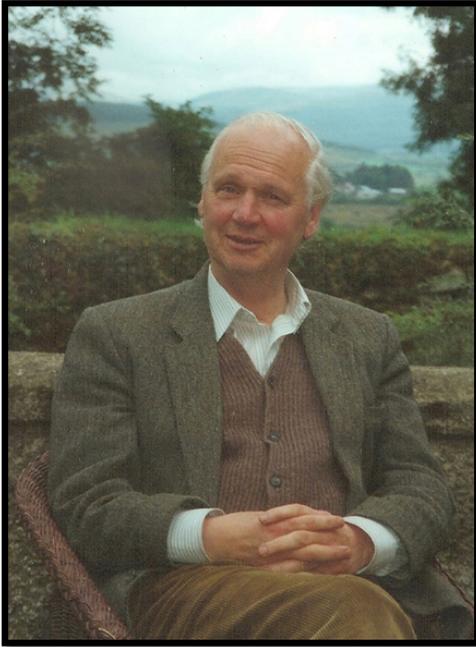
elements such as bungalows, pubs, churches and pine forests, which have no sense of context or continuity, and display only a rootless, commonplace modernity’.² The enduring achievement of the *Atlas* is its multi-faceted treatment of both the physical and cultural components of landscape, reaching out to offer the reader an accessible appreciation of why the Irish landscape is a resource and a heritage to be both valued and enjoyed.

At Trinity, Fred was made a fellow (1980) and later an associate professor. He was also awarded a doctorate by publication (1991). He led field trips to such places as Denmark, Dingle, Northumberland and Sardinia, encouraging his students to open their eyes to the landscape and introducing them to such exotic mysteries of the cultural landscape as dry stone walling, booley huts, green villages and upland mediaeval sites now long abandoned. Specialising in courses on Ireland, planning and conservation, and cultural geography, his lectures, sometimes interspersed with touches of his characteristic quiet humour, were as well-received in the 1990s as they had been in the 1960s. Other Trinity duties included serving as a member of the college board, acting at various times as senior tutor, warden of Trinity Hall and secretary of the common room, and involvement with the staff cricket club. On his retirement from his full-time appointment in 1999, he became professor and fellow emeritus.

Beyond the college, Fred lectured in Geography at the Church of Ireland College of Education during the early and middle 1960s. He was an active contributor to the work of both the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and the Geographical Society of Ireland, serving a three-year term as president of the

² In the second edition of the *Atlas* (2011, p. 30), these statements appear with a number of changes. The phrases ‘or disciplined’ and ‘a data bank of humiliation’ are deleted from the first and second statements quoted above. In the third quote, the un-Fred-like ‘frenetic splurge’ substitutes for ‘energetic creation’, while ‘a banal modernity’ replaces ‘a rootless, commonplace modernity’.

latter in 1967-69. From 1968 to 1971, he was chair of a Royal Irish Academy (RIA) committee on the teaching of Geography (1968-71). He was elected a member of the RIA in 1987. In addition to his commitments with An Foras Forbartha and other planning and conservation organisations, he was for a time a member of RIA National Committee for Geography and of the board of visitors of the National Museum of Ireland. Other bodies with which he was involved included the Heritage Council and the Irish Council for Overseas Students. At the international level, he engaged with the International Planning History Society, the 'Permanent Conference on the European Rural Landscape', and the work of IUCN –World Conservation Movement.



He taught at an overseas summer school in both the United States and Canada, and also undertook teaching engagements in Greece and Kenya. His work was recognised (2000) in being awarded honorary membership of the Irish Landscape Institute. With his *Atlas* co-editors, he was awarded the Donnelly Prize of the American Conference for Irish Studies and the Manning Robertson Prize of the Irish Branch of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

In 1989, Fred and Bet moved from Trinity Hall to west Wicklow, to live in the midst of a landscape that had fascinated him for thirty years. He was a widely-read and ultimately generous, if sometimes rather aloof, personality who in retirement sought

to maintain an ecologically-harmonious lifestyle while enjoying his family and continuing with his interests in countryside planning and in classical and church music. Reflecting on the landscapes of his youth, he co-ordinated a beautifully-presented and deeply satisfying book on north-east England for a series under the auspices of English Heritage. He also maintained an active concern with progress on the second edition of the *Atlas*. But it was west Wicklow that saw the end of his work and life. His home in retirement was a former farm-house in a traditional style that thoroughly merited its inclusion as a drawing in the *Atlas*. The place-names expert Liam Price had given Fred unique photographs and other materials relating to 'pre-reservoir' [i.e. pre-1940s] west Wicklow, but a decade ago, Fred appreciated that he might never have the time to do justice to this resource. He passed the records to archaeologist Christiaan Corlett who, much to Fred's satisfaction, made them accessible by publication.³ Corlett paid fitting tribute to

³ Corlett, C.(ed) *Beneath the Poulaphuca reservoir: the 1939 Poulaphuca survey of the lands flooded by the Liffey reservoir scheme* (Dublin: Stationery Office).

this act of intellectual generosity at the funeral and celebration of Fred's life which took place on 30 September 2015 at St Kevin's Church of Ireland, Hollywood (County Wicklow), appropriately in a building that is corbelled in its roofing and set in the heart of the rural landscape that meant so much to him.

Fred Aalen will be warmly remembered by Irish geographers as an able, wide-ranging scholar whose lasting legacy is to have done so much to promote a greater appreciation of both the historical and contemporary aspects of landscape and planning issues within, and also beyond, Ireland. He is survived by his wife, Bet, a Durham theology graduate whom he had met while at university and whom he married in 1959, by their children, Niels and Kathy, and their grandchildren, Matthias and Johanna.

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Publications of Fred Aalen – A Select List

In the following list, a small number of items produced with limited circulation which have been judged to be significant in relation to Fred's intellectual career have been included, while most book reviews, as well as some newspaper and other short pieces, have been omitted.

1962

Some historical aspects of landscape and rural life in Omeath, Co. Louth, *Irish Geography*, 4 (4), 1962, 256-278.

Tradition and history in Omeath, County Louth, *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society*, 15 (2), 121-124.

1963

A review of recent Irish population trends, *Population Studies*, 17 (1), 1963, 73-78.

A note on transhumance in the Wicklow Mountains, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 93 (2), pp. 189-190.

1964

Transhumance in the Wicklow mountains, *Ulster Folklife*, 10, 65-72.

Clochans as transhumance dwellings in the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 94 (1), 39-45

(with R.J. Hunter), The estate maps of Trinity College: an introduction and annotated catalogue, *Hermathena*, 98, 85-96.

(with R.J. Hunter) Two early 17th century maps of Donegal, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 94 (2), 199-202.

Reprinted in R.J. Hunter, *Ulster transformed: essays on plantation and print culture c.1590-1641* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2012), 134-138.

1965

Enclosures in Eastern Ireland: report of a symposium, together with a general introduction, *Irish Geography*, 5 (1), 29-34.

1966

The evolution of the traditional house in western Ireland, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 96 (1), 47-58. (with D.A. Gillmor and P.W. Williams) *West Wicklow. Background for Development* (Dublin, 1966). 250 pp.

‘Definition of Kilkenny region’ and ‘Physical features and resources’ in A. Pakenham-Walsh (ed), *Kilkenny region: a pilot study* (University of Dublin Administrative Research Bureau for Kilkenny County Industrial Development Committee), 8.06 to 9.21.

1967

Furnishings of traditional houses in the Wicklow hills, *Ulster Folklife*, 13, 61-8.

Rural Surveys and the Role of Local Development Associations: A Case-Study in West Wicklow, *Administration*, 15 (2), 109-127.

Research in some aspects of historical geography in Ireland, *Kosmos* [Dublin University Experimental Science Association], 5, 1967.

1968

‘Demography’, pp. 104-108, and ‘Rural and urban settlements’, in *Encyclopaedia of Ireland* (Dublin: Allen Figgis), 150-155.

1969

(with H. Brody) *Gola, the life and last days of an island community*. (Cork: Mercier) 127 pp.

Extract on The Rosses and Gweedore in *Donegal Annual*, 8(1), 73.

(with J.C. Bird) *Tourism in Ireland-East: guidelines for development* [Dublin: Eastern Regional Tourism Organisation] 193 pp. [includes (with J.C. Bird) *The Cooley Survey*, 53 pp. (also available separately)].

The Buchanan report, *Public Affairs*, 1 (9), 14-16.

1970

The origin of enclosures in eastern Ireland, pp. 209-223 in R.E. Glasscock and N. Stephens (eds) *Irish Geographical studies in honour of E. Estyn Evans* (Belfast).

(with E.A. Colhoun, D.A. Gillmor and A.A. Horner) *County Kildare. A Geographical Background for Planning* (2 vols, Dublin: Department of Geography, Trinity College).

Author: 'The demographic background', Section 3, and 'The County of Kildare and its planning problems', Section 5.

The house types of Gola Island, Co. Donegal. *Folklife*, 8, 32-44.

1972

Planning in the metropolitan hinterland: Co. Kildare, *Administration*, 20 (1), 5-28.

1973

Vernacular Architecture of the British Isles, *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers*, 35, 27-48.

1978

Man and the landscape in Ireland (London: Academic Press) 343pp.

1979

Contributor, settlement section, to *Atlas of Ireland* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy).

1982

The Cycladic House in South Ewoia [Euboea], eastern Greece, *Vernacular Architecture*, 13, 5-19.

1983

Perspectives on the Irish landscape in prehistory and history, in T. Reeves-Smith and F. Hammond (eds), *Landscape Archaeology in Ireland*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 116, 357-377.

The coastlands and islands of north-west Ireland, southern and eastern Ireland, north Cornwall and Devon, west Wales, Isle of Man and western Scotland: a physical, economic and social survey. [Memorial on Britain/ Ireland division of the continental shelf] (Office of the Attorney-General, Dublin, 135 pp., unpublished).

1984

'Approaches to the working-class housing problem in late Victorian Dublin: the Dublin Artisans Dwelling Company and the Guinness (later Iveagh) Trust', in

R.J. Bender (ed) 'New research on the social geography of Ireland', *Mannheimer Geographische Arbeiten*, 17, 161-190.

Vernacular buildings in Cephalonia, Ionian Island, Greece, *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 4, 56-72.

1985

'The Working Class Housing Movement in Dublin, 1850-1920' pp. 131-188 in Michael J. Bannon, (ed), *The Emergence of Irish Planning 1880-1920* (Dublin, 1985).

(editor) *The Future of the Irish Rural Landscape*. (Dublin: Department of Geography, Trinity College, Dublin).

Author: 'The rural landscape: change, conservation and planning', 1-25.

Formes traditionnelles d'architecture à Céphalone (Grèce), *Méditerranée (Revue Géographique des Pays Méditerranéens)*, 4, 47-51.

'The British Isles first major housing programme', *Planning History Bulletin*, 7 (3), 32-40.

'Blicke in die Landschaft', section translated from Man and the landscape in Ireland (1978), 212-222 in V. Bartsch (ed), *Irland: eine reise-lesebuch* (Hamburg).

1986

'Rural change and landscape quality: experience and planning in Europe and Ireland', in C. Thomas (ed) *Rural landscapes and communities: essays presented to Desmond McCourt* (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press), 215-244.

The rehousing of rural labourers in Ireland under the Labourers (Ireland) Acts, 1883-1919, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 12 (3), 287-306.

1987

Public housing in Ireland, 1880-1921, *Planning Perspectives*, 2 (2), 175-193.

Review Article: Greek Vernacular Architecture, *Vernacular Architecture*, 18(1), 41-50.

1988

Homes for Irish heroes: housing under the Irish Land (Provision for Soldiers and Sailors) Act 1919, and the Irish Sailors' and Soldiers' Land Trust, *Town Planning Review*, 59 (3), 305-324.

1989

Lord Meath, city improvement and social imperialism, *Planning Perspectives* 4,

127-152.

Imprint of the past, in D.A. Gillmor (ed) *The Irish countryside: landscape, wildlife, people* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press), 83-121. [republished 1990, with new title *Our way of life*].

1990

The Iveagh Trust: The First Hundred Years, 1890-1990 (Dublin: Iveagh Trust).

‘Traditional rural buildings’, in A. Steinecke (ed) *Irland – ein Express-Reisehandbuch*, (Leer: Mundo Verlag), 199-204.

1991

‘Dublin’s physical growth and rise to pre-eminence’, in A. MacLaran (ed) *Dublin in Crisis*. Trinity Papers in Geography, No. 5, 1-16.

1992

(editor, with K. Whelan) *Dublin – city and county: from prehistory to present – studies in honour of J.H. Andrews* (Dublin: Geography Publications).

Author of ‘Health and housing in Dublin c. 1850-1921’, in F.H.A. Aalen & K. Whelan (eds) *Dublin – city and county: from prehistory to present* (Dublin: Geography Publications), 279-304.

‘Ireland, in C.G. Pooley (ed) *Housing strategies in Europe 1880-1930*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 132-163.

English origins: the rural and utopian context 1850-1921, in S.V. Ward (ed) *The garden city: past, present and future* (London and New York: Spon), 28-51.

‘Rural Ireland under constructive unionism, c. 1880-1921’, in C. Silver (ed) *Proceedings of the fourth national conference on American Planning History/ Fifth international planning history group* (Ohio, 1992), 246-264.

1993

Constructive Unionism and the Shaping of Rural Ireland, c. 1880–1921, *Rural history*, 4 (2) 137-164.

(editor with K. Whelan, and M. Stout – cartographic editor), *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape: pilot project* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy) 99 pp.

1994

Vernacular rural dwellings of the Wicklow mountains, in K. Hannigan and W. Nolan (eds) *Wicklow: history and society* (Dublin: Geography Publications), 581-624.

Colloquium to integrate different approaches to study and management of landscapes, *Environmental strategy* (Bulletin of IUCN – World Conservation Union), 19-21.

Management of the rural landscape, in *The Irish countryside – evolution or decline?* Conference proceedings of the Irish Landscape Institute, Dublin, 20-28.

1996

Landscape Study and Management (Dublin: Boole Press and Office of Public Works) 193 pp.

Author: ‘Approaches to the study and management of the landscape’, 1-12.

‘Vernacular architecture: Southern Europe’, in Jane Turner (ed), *The dictionary of art*, vol. 32, (Oxford: Grove), 289-295.

1997

(editor, with K. Whelan and M. Stout) *Atlas of the Irish rural landscape* (Cork: Cork University Press), 352 pp.

Author of ‘The Irish rural landscape: synthesis of habitat and history’ (4-30), ‘Fields’ (with K. Whelan, 134-144), ‘Buildings’ (145-179), ‘Contemporary challenge’ (236-243), ‘Management of the landscape’ (255-259).

‘Population’, in Paul Oliver (ed) *Encyclopaedia of the vernacular architecture of the World* (3 vols, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 160-168.

1999

(with J. Bintliff, E. Sagalos and P. Spoerry) ‘The traditional vernacular architecture of Livadhia’, in *Livadhia: Past, Present and Future: Proceedings of the 1997 conference*, Society for Boeotian Studies, 85-99). [in Greek].

2000

Facing up to environmentalism, *Search: a Church of Ireland journal*, 23(1), 5-20.

2001

‘Landscape development and change’, in Bryn Green and Willem Vos (eds), *Threatened landscapes: Conserving cultural environments*. (London and New York: Spon Press), 3-20.

(editor, with M. Hennessy) *Proceedings of the Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape. Papers from the 17th Session, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, 1996* (Dublin: Department of Geography, Trinity College, University of Dublin) 119 pp.

2002

General editor, with K. Whelan and M. Stout, *Irish landscape series*, volumes 1 to 4, Cork University Press.

(ed) *Eastern Ireland*, Field guide for Vernacular Architecture Group Spring Conference 2002, 52 pp.

2004

‘The mythical isles and North Atlantic discovery’, in H.B. Clarke, J. Prunty and M. Hennessy (eds) *Surveying Ireland’s Past: multidisciplinary essays in honour of Anngret Simms* (Dublin: Geography Publications), 169-196.

‘The study and management of Europe’s landscapes’, in P.N. Doukellis and L.G. Mendoni (eds) *Perception and evaluation of cultural landscapes: proceedings of an international symposium, Zakynthos, December 1997* (Athens and Paris: *Melethmata*, 38), 1-16.

2006

(editor, with Colum O’Brien) *England’s landscape: The North-east* (Book 7, England’s landscape series) (London: Collins/ English Heritage) 256pp.

Author: ‘North-eastern landscapes’ (11-16), ‘Environmental setting and regional forms’ (17-30), ‘Landscape components’ (109-146, with Richard Muir), ‘Mosaic of landscapes’ (201-224, with Richard Muir), ‘Landscape change, conservation and management’ (239-245).

2011

(editor, with K. Whelan and M. Stout) *Atlas of the Irish rural landscape* (Cork: U.P.), 2nd edition.