



At Ballylickey

Ellen's parents were Thomas and Elinor Hutchins who lived at Ballylickey, as had her grandparents before them.

Ellen was one of the youngest of twenty one children, but only six of the children survived to adulthood. Ellen's father Thomas died when she was two, and her only sister when she was four, leaving her with a widowed mother and four brothers.

As a young girl, while at school near Dublin, she fell ill and was sent to live with Dr Whitley Stokes, a family friend in Dublin. Botany was one of his interests and he encouraged Ellen to take it up as a healthy activity. She studied his books and eagerly learned from him. He put her in touch with another botanist, James Mackay, curator of the Trinity College Dublin botanic garden.

The young woman, her looks and her character

There is no known portrait of Ellen, and few descriptions of her. Ellen wrote of her 'tall figure'. Lewis Dillwyn* writing to Dawson Turner told him that *'Miss Hutchins is a very sensible, pleasing, square-made and tolerably good-looking woman of about 30 years old.'* She was actually 24 at the time!

Of Ellen's character, Lewis Dillwyn said *'She naturally possesses very strong senses and pleasing unaffected manners. ... Such is Miss H's liberality [generosity] that we came away loaded with her duplicates [of specimens of plants]. I think Woods is enraptured of her, and I have very rarely met with any person equally sensible and interesting.'*

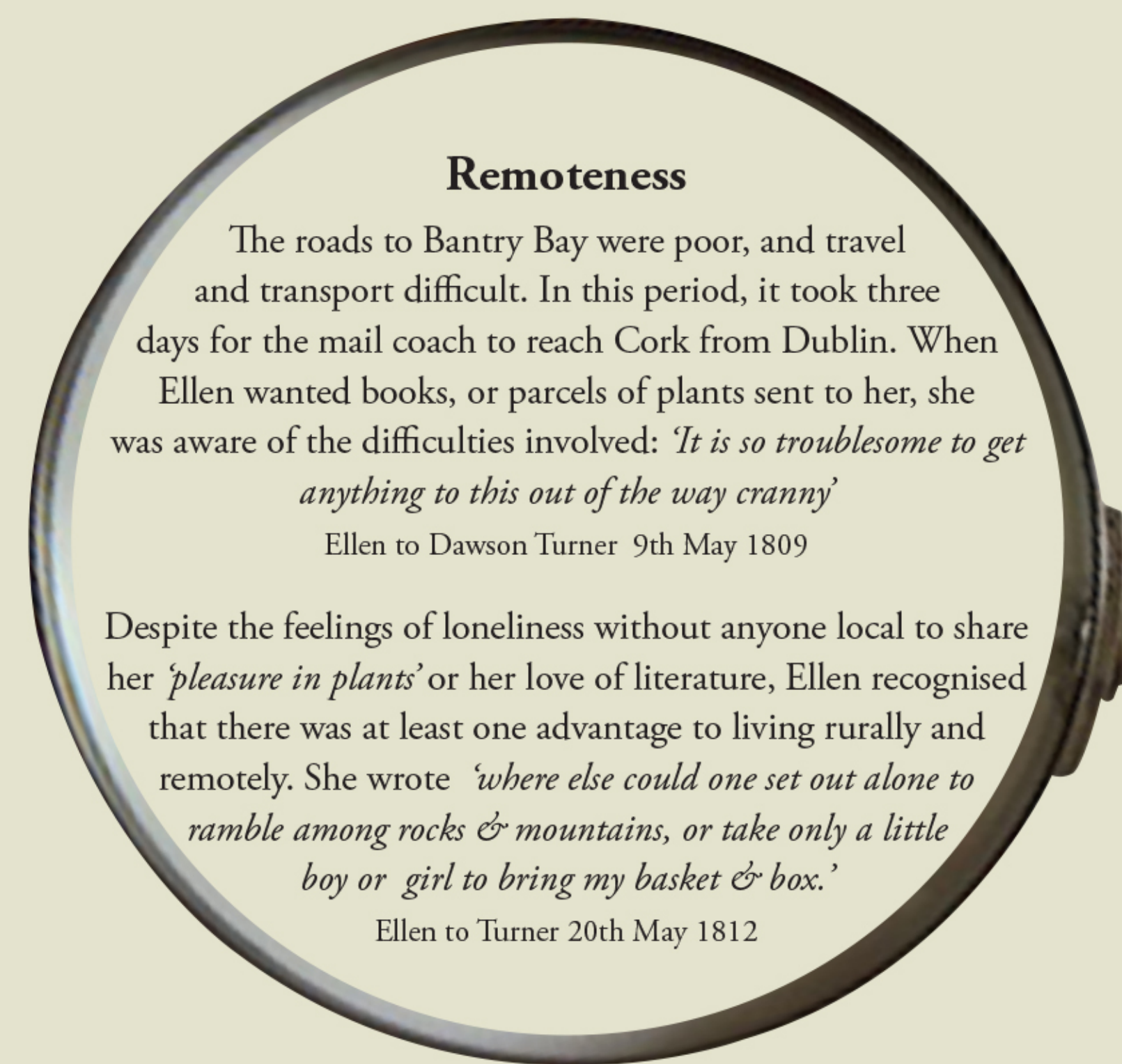
DILLWYN TO TURNER 22 JULY 1809

Ellen's letters show that she was full of feeling, possessed a religious sensibility, had a great appreciation of beauty, and strong reactions to what she perceived as unfairness or wrongdoing.

*See '1809 Botanists at Ballylickey and the Hutchins household' for more on Lewis Dillwyn



Letter Ellen to Samuel Hutchins 3 April 1807
Image courtesy of the Hutchins family



Remoteness

The roads to Bantry Bay were poor, and travel and transport difficult. In this period, it took three days for the mail coach to reach Cork from Dublin. When Ellen wanted books, or parcels of plants sent to her, she was aware of the difficulties involved: *'It is so troublesome to get anything to this out of the way cranny'*
Ellen to Dawson Turner 9th May 1809

Despite the feelings of loneliness without anyone local to share her *'pleasure in plants'* or her love of literature, Ellen recognised that there was at least one advantage to living rurally and remotely. She wrote *'where else could one set out alone to ramble among rocks & mountains, or take only a little boy or girl to bring my basket & box.'*
Ellen to Turner 20th May 1812

1805

By 1805, aged twenty, Ellen was back home in Ballylickey, caring for her elderly and ill mother, and helping to look after her brother Tom, who was disabled.

Botany was for Ellen an amusement and a delight. She would go up the mountains, take the family boat round to Whiddy Island, tend her garden, walk by the river and the shoreline at Ballylickey, or go to the woods at Glengarriff in search of specimens, which she brought home to identify and press.

That summer, James Mackay made a tour of West Cork and visited Ellen at Ballylickey. She was delighted to have contact with someone who shared her 'pleasure in plants'. He suggested that she collect seaweeds.

Ellen and James Mackay wrote to each other, exchanging specimens, and comparing notes on their finds. Some of Ellen's specimens are tiny scraps folded into the letter, others are carefully spread onto paper and dried. Many of these are still in the herbarium at Trinity College Dublin, others Mackay sent on to the specialists studying seaweeds.

1807

By 1807, Ellen had made significant finds and some were going to be published by others, but without her name given as the discoverer of the plants, because she 'had desired that it should not'. In a letter to her eldest brother, Emanuel, Ellen gives her own description of her success in botany:

'For some time past I have amused myself learning botany. I am told by those who are good judges that I have made very great progress for the time I have been learning, in a curious and difficult branch, that of marine plants. I have been very successful and have discovered a great number of kinds unknown before.'

I send my plants to Mr Mackay. ... He gives me all the information that I want & sends the plants to those who describe and publish. I also send a great number to Dr Stokes & have made him a very fine collection. He says he is quite astonished at the progress I have made.'

ELLEN TO EMANUEL HUTCHINS 16TH APRIL 1807

Ellen asks her brother whether she should allow her name to be given by the botanists who published the descriptions of her discoveries. There is no record of an answer from Emanuel, but in December 1807 Ellen agreed to having her name used.



Ballylickey House c 1910 Image courtesy of the Hutchins family



Thomas Hutchins silhouette by his eldest daughter, Katherine Hutchins Image courtesy of the Hutchins family

Sickness & Health

Ellen's health was poor much of the time, and she was also very concerned and affected by the ill health of family members. In her letters, she always mentioned her own health.

'I am very well, quite strong. I walk, I botanise a good deal.' ELLEN TO SAM HUTCHINS 1ST JUNE 1807

'Your letter... found me just beginning to recover from a very severe attack of my bilious complaint which weakened me so much that until within the last week I have not been able to make any exertion.'
ELLEN TO DAWSON TURNER 4TH SEPTEMBER 1809

'I am quite strong and out before 7 o'clock in the morning with the workmen'

ELLEN TO TURNER 11TH MARCH 1811

'My time is now so entirely occupied with minute domestic concerns and I may add troubles that I have little leisure and less spirit to attend to anything amusing. I seldom have an hour that I can call my own except early in the mornings and at night after I settle my Mother to sleep when I walk out to enjoy in silence and solitude the delightful softness of the night either by the seashore or by the river. Here I recover my spirits or rather become calm after the agitations of the day.' ELLEN TO TURNER 13TH JULY 1812

1809

Botanists at Ballylickey and the Hutchins household

In the summer of 1809, botanists Lewis Dillwyn, Joseph Woods and William Leach travelled to West Cork, and they had with them a letter of introduction from Dr Whitley Stokes of Dublin to Ellen Hutchins at Ballylickey. Lewis Dillwyn kept a diary:

Monday 17th July 1809

'The house [Ballylickey] surrounded by a plantation of trees is delightfully situated at the head of a small cove... & commands a beautiful prospect of the bay & its surrounding mountains.'

'I busied myself until noon in looking over a part of Miss Hutchins's extensive and well arranged collection of algae etc and we then, accompanied by her younger brother [Sam] embarked on board the family pleasure boat for a sail on the bay. We landed on a rather large island called Whittie [Whiddy], the shores of which are very steep and rocky & there I gathered several marine algae [seaweed] which I never saw growing before.'

'We returned to Ballylickey and after dinner employed ourselves until 10 o'clock in examining different parts of Miss Hutchins's extensive collections.'

'The master of the house at Ballylickey is Mr Thomas Hutchins who about ten years ago lost the use of his limbs so that he is obliged to be carried from one room to another, & with him an aged Mother and his Sister [Ellen] reside. The liberality, politeness and hospitality of all these we have great cause to remember.'

Gardening at Ballylickey

James Mackay sent Ellen wonderful presents of plants for her garden, her 'rock', and her green house, and wrote *'I doubt not that the whole will thrive under your fostering hand.'* (MACKAY TO ELLEN 22 MARCH 1806); a year later, Ellen confirmed that *'All the plants you sent me are growing finely.'* (ELLEN TO MACKAY 6TH SEPTEMBER 1807) Ellen's interest in gardening continued: *'I am very busy planting & gardening & making alterations outside, which I delight in.'* (ELLEN TO MACKAY 11TH MARCH 1811)

Emanuel and Arthur Hutchins

From documents and letters it appears that Ellen's two eldest brothers, Emanuel and Arthur, were in a long running series of disputes with each other over property. The members of the family at Ballylickey were often drawn into these disputes, or accused of taking sides, and this caused great anguish, heartache and anger. Ellen let her feelings show very strongly in some letters to Emanuel, but was extremely discreet about this in her letters to Dawson Turner and only alluded to 'troubles'.

By 1813 things had clearly become much worse, and Ellen wrote to Dawson Turner: *'My situation is one of uncommon misery. I look around me & see no person so surrounded with troubles. But why my dear sir should I trouble you with my sufferings when I cannot explain my story. I can only say that some disputes in my family have for years oppressed my spirits & broken my heart.'* (ELLEN TO TURNER 12TH JUNE 1813)

Later that year, Ellen writing to Turner from Bandon, said that she and her mother had moved to get better medical care. We have a different version of events in a letter from William Jackson Hooker to Dawson Turner with information from Ellen's cousin Thomas Taylor, also a botanist. Taylor said that Emanuel had taken possession of the house at Ballylickey and therefore Ellen and her mother had had to move elsewhere. (HOOKER TO TURNER 6TH DECEMBER 1813)

The Hutchins family at Ballylickey and Ardnagashel

Arthur Hutchins, the second brother, bought land at Ardnagashel, just along the bay from Ballylickey, where he built a house for his family, and established gardens and an arboretum. After the death of both Arthur and Emanuel, Ardnagashel passed to Ellen's youngest brother, Samuel, and on to descendants of his. The house and most of the land were sold in 1946.

The Hutchins family lived at Ballylickey from the early 1700s to the 1890s, and then again from 1910 to about 1920.



Ardnagashel House by Louisa Hutchins 1844
Image courtesy of the Hutchins family

Letter credits

Ellen to Turner : Wren Library, Trinity College Cambridge
Dillwyn to Turner : Wren Library, Trinity College Cambridge
Mackay to Turner : Wren Library, Trinity College Cambridge
Ellen to Mackay : Herbarium, Botany Department, Trinity College Dublin
Mackay to Ellen : Archives, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London
Hooker to Turner : Archives, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London; in the volume 'W. J. Hooker letters vol. 1 1805 to 1832', ff. 173-4
Ellen to Emanuel Hutchins : Hutchins family
Ellen to Sam Hutchins : Hutchins family

For further information and resources see www.ellenhutchins.com