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WHEN ONE STORY WILL DO: THE HERITAGISATION OF WILD GARLIC IN IRELAND

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the rise in the profile, presence and heritagisation of wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*) in Ireland since the late twentieth century. It considers how an era-contained representation of the plant was developed in response to external influences and used in identity-formation linked to ideas of Irish environmental purity, exceptionalism, and a romantic Celtic-Gaelic mystique.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years wild garlic has undergone a process of heritagisation in Ireland within certain socio-demographic food communities.¹ Intermeshed in this process are the influences of food and culinary fashions, themselves often the product of collaborative and collective food movements, together with more recent existential threats linked to environmental degradation, globalisation and modern food systems. Navigating these macro-change complexities through an evocation of food in/of the past is perceived as a means of restoring stability to self, community and locality in the face of global insecurities. To-date, however, engagement with the plant's historical past has been cursory, producing an idealised and highly romanticised identity that is stuck somewhere in prehistoric and medieval Ireland and one that is heavily and overly reliant on the work of the scholars A.T. Lucas² and Fergus Kelly.³ This

1 Reference to this study: Regina: When One Story Will Do: The Heritagisation of Wild Garlic in Ireland. In Anikó Báti and Patricia Lysaght (eds.): *Living Eating Habits, Revitalized Foodways and the Concepts of Tradition and Food Heritage*. Budapest: ELTE RCH Institute of Ethnology – Museum of Ethnography, 2025. pp. 191–206.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61380/978-963-567-084-0-10>

2 Lucas, A.T.: 'Irish Food Before the Potato', *Gwerin* 3/2 (1960), 8–43.

3 Kelly, Fergus: *Early Irish Farming: a study based mainly on law-texts of the 7th and 8th centuries AD*, (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1997).

fragmented capture of the past has limited social good outside domains that benefit most from its creation. These developments prompt the questions: what does heritage do, who creates it, and how did a particular episteme for wild garlic develop and influence the plant's heritage status?

This paper aims to answer these questions by engaging with folk narratives, and media coverage of wild garlic in Irish newspapers from the mid-nineteenth century. The plant's representation in cookery books will be considered alongside insights provided by chef-proprietor Denis Cotter, who was one of the first in Ireland to bring the plant to a public forum through his writings⁴ and through cookery in the vegetarian restaurant, Paradiso, in Cork City (Fig. 1). The paper will also explore how selective recourse to food in the past is one symptomatic response to a convergence of multiple postmodern food anxieties in the different eras of globalisation, particularly the implications of the rapid rate of change in the third and fourth waves, and within this frame, it will be argued the heritagisation of wild garlic can be taken as a dense example of reflexive modernity.

WILD GARLIC IN TWENTIETH FIRST-CENTURY IRELAND: RETRIEVING AND REVIVING ITS PAST LIVES

Since the late twentieth century, interest in wild garlic, which is now positioned as a leading representative of traditional wild foods and 'a gateway drug for the novice forager',⁵ to prompt engagement with a wider range of edible wild plants, has grown incrementally with a significant peak in interest from the early 2000s. This upsurge in interest is well represented in print media where interest in the plant has moved to performative and experiential realms of cooking (with wild garlic pesto a near iconic preparation) and wild garlic encounters in restaurant, foraging, and Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) contexts. Of note is the overlap in connection-making and the rise of social media. Here wild garlic is a vibrant model of kitchen, woodland and restaurant scenes in the creation of 'Instagram-able' simulacra. Within this period, wild garlic has been constructively positioned as not only the poster-boy of wild foods but platformed as a symbolic representative of an essential Irish food tradition rooted in the antiquity of the historical and pre-historic pasts. This development has

4 Cotter, Denis: *Wild Garlic, Gooseberries and Me* (London: Collins, 2007).

5 McMahan, Jp.: *An Alphabet of Anair: Notes for a New Irish Cuisine* (Galway: Godot Press, 2023), 203.



*Fig. 1. Potato gnocchi, wild garlic sauce, fried nettles, pistachio. Paradiso, Cork City.
(Reproduced by kind permission of Denis Cotter)*

been cultivated and supported by food writers⁶ and chefs⁷ and associated communities of consumers whose knowledge of food goes beyond gastronomy and into the cultural realm that is often captured in productions of the plant's 'story'.

On one level, engagement with wild garlic can be viewed as a means of building gastro-cultural capital. However, this development is a multi-layered phenomenon shaped by food movements and counter movements and flecked by a complex entanglement of postmodern societal concerns. In these grand narratives, the heritagisation of wild plant foods, here specifically wild garlic, is one small but energetic expression of attempts at re-evaluating food systems and reforming food connections at personal, community and societal levels. Essentially, the case of wild garlic and its re-imagining is an Irish example of broader food trends⁸ that are common to certain demographics in the global north, where a re-consideration of food in the past encapsulates opposition to the impact of successive waves of globalisation on local food systems. In unravelling the complexities of different waves of globalisation – economic, cultural, and digital – wild garlic is cast in multiple allegorical and thematic narratives (decline and revival; lost and found; local/traditional and global/modern; local heterogeneity and global cultural homogeneity). These roles are performed in traditional and digital media and in wild-centric activities like foraging, wild food cookery, and wild food events.⁹

The intentional re-visiting of the past lives of wild edible plants was popularised in the 1970s with the publication of Richard Mabey's *Food for Free*, a work built in part

6 For instance, Fitzgibbon, Theodora: *Irish Traditional Food* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983); Mahon, Bríd: *Land of Milk and Honey; The Story of Traditional Irish Food and Drink* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1991); Connery, Claire: *In an Irish Country Kitchen* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992); Sexton, Regina: 'Wild about Foraging,' *The Irish Examiner* (26 October 2011), 17.

7 For instance, Allen, Darina: *Irish Traditional Cookery* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1995); Allen, Darina: 'It will suit you to a tea; [section] wild food,' *The Irish Examiner* (22 May 2010), 25; Cotter, Denis: *Wild Garlic, Gooseberries and Me*; White-Lennon, Biddy and Doyle, Evan: *Wild Food: Nature's Harvest: How to Gather, Cook and Preserve* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2013); McMahon, Jp.: *An Alphabet of Aniar: Notes for a New Irish Cuisine* (Galway: Godot Press, 2023); McMahon, Jp.: *The Irish Cook Book* (London/New York: Phaidon Press, 2020); McMahon, Jp.: *An Irish Food Story: 100 Foods That Made Us* (Dublin: Nine Bean Rows Books, 2024).

8 A similar trend is evident in the UK. See, for example: 'It's wild garlic season. Again. But what are you actually meant to do with it?,' *Independent* (8 April 2025); 'Excessive foraging for wild garlic and mushrooms in UK 'a risk to wildlife', *The Guardian* (13 May 2023), and the slightly more sardonic, 'City folk go wild for wild garlic,' *The Spectator* (11 April 2024).

9 Media representations range from descriptions of foraging and cooking, often accompanied by history notes and the pleasures of connections with nature; for instance, *The Northern Standard* (6 May 2010), 8; *The Irish Examiner* (26 October 2011), 17; *The Irish Independent* (18 February 2013), 27; *The Munster Express* (26 April 2013), 22; *The Connaught Telegraph* (12 April 2016), 29; *The Sunday Independent* (6 March 2022), 38–40.

on an inheritance of traditional knowledge from multiple sources and written in a time of growing environmental awareness.¹⁰ This book was a pioneering publication that spoke to the zeitgeist of the time and pre-empted the more recent fashion for artisanal foraging. Selling an estimated one million copies, its influence on models of thinking related to wild foods that blend into heritage a mix of history and tradition in serving present-day concerns, should not be underestimated. There followed in 1978 an Irish publication, *Wild and Free*, by Cyril and Kit Ó Céirín that served as a more practical guide to collecting, cooking and preserving wild plant foods. This publication includes a range of wild plants with an enduring connection to traditional Irish foodways as evidenced in the overlap in the Ó Céirín work and the data in the National Folklore Collection (NFC).¹¹ Significantly, there is no mention of wild garlic in *Wild and Free* nor does it feature as a plant of culinary significance in the folklife material of the NFC. The NFC Main Manuscript Collection and the Schools' Collection preserve extraordinarily rich data relating to Irish folklore and folklife collected from the 1930s. Here wild garlic is not recorded as a culinary item; rather it is remembered only for its human and animal medicinal uses, and to a lesser extent it is highlighted as a problematic plant that taints the taste of milk and butter if consumed by cows.

By the early decades of the twentieth century wild garlic did not hold any significant or distinctive culinary role in practice or memory. In this regard it could be argued that as an item of the wild and outside of conventional consumption patterns, its food-use may have gone unrecorded – remaining silent in record but alive in practice as a marginalised outside-of-systems-activity. Yet, it is reasonable to expect to find some traces, however slim, of its culinary uses in the folklore material, in the same way that these accounts hold memory of other wild-plant foods. Furthermore, data collected from the Irish Newspaper Archive¹² between 1845 and the 1940s resonates with its representation in folk accounts in addressing almost exclusively its medicinal properties and butter/milk-tainting characteristics. In the newspapers, there are just a few references to memories of its use as a food¹³ and as a [cultivated] garlic-

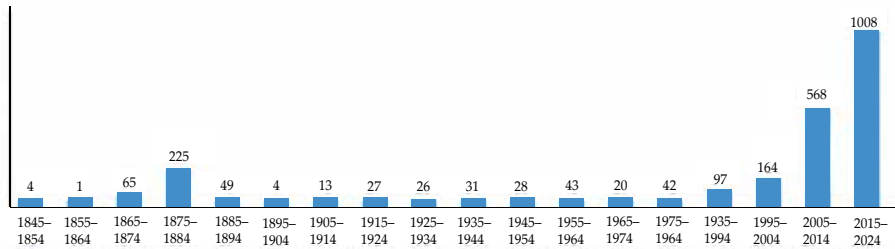
10 Mabey, Richard: *Food for Free* (London: Collins, 1972). Mabey's work built on inheritance from historical sources – for example, *Flora Diaetetica* by Charles Bryant, published in 1783, and a wartime UK Government's leaflet, *Hedgerow Harvest*, of 1943 (London: Ministry of Food 1943).

11 Ó Céirín, Cyril and Kit: *Wild and Free* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1978). Of note, in terms of the overlap between the Ó Céirín work and the NFC data are the uses of watercress, nettles, sorrel, dandelions, field mushrooms, wild apples, blackberries, bilberries and seaweeds, in traditional Irish foodways, detailed in the NFC.

12 See Irish Newspaper Archives.

13 *The Irish Press* (17 November 1936), 15.

substitute,¹⁴ and there are anecdotal accounts of its role as an ‘ancient food’,¹⁵ but these may simply reflect popular interest in Irish history, particularly as influenced by cultural and political movements that tended to inflate Ireland’s Celtic and Gaelic pasts.



Tabl. 1. Newspaper coverage of wild garlic from 117 national and regional newspapers from 1845 to 2024 leading to 2435 results. The peak from the 1860 to the 1880s relates to advertising for a commercial powder used to remove the taste of wild garlic from butter. The significant upsurge in coverage from the late 20th century represents food and cookery columns that mix recipes with antiquity, nature and seasonality elements. (Source: Irish Newspaper Archive database)

In practice, the erosion of the plant’s culinary role was part of an overall decline in assigning value to wild foods. Therefore, it is of note that newspaper references to the culinary uses of wild garlic began to appear from the 1970s¹⁶ at a time when the publications by Mabey and Ó Céirín were influencing those interested in the food-nature-environment-connections and those concerned with the socio-environmental impacts of the productivist model of food production. Attention to the plant in these accounts focused on the novel element of consuming wild plants, especially from the economic perspective of their ‘free’ status, and there is a call to venture into hedgerows and woodlands.¹⁷ Treatment of wild garlic had not yet evolved into the provision of recipes, with food, cookery and gardening writers simply encouraging experimentation at a time when it is imagined, that the Irish palate was just coming to terms with the use and taste of cultivated garlic, as it overcame prejudice against its pungency and its ‘overuse amongst foreigners.’¹⁸

14 *The Irish Times* (3 May 1930), 3.

15 See, for instance, *The Southern Star* (17 December 1921), 3; *The Belfast Newsletter* (26 May 1926), 10; *The Donegal Democrat* (23 August 1941), 2.

16 *The Irish Independent* (Tuesday, 12 July 1977), 8.

17 See, for instance, *The Irish Independent* (Tuesday, 12 July 1977), 8; *The Clare Champion* (Friday, 2 September 1983), 27, and *The Irish Press* (24 November 1984), 7.

18 See, for instance, in this regard, *The Irish Independent* (3 July 1984), 7, and *The Clare Champion* (7 September 1984), 8.

In restaurants, wild garlic was also overlooked outside of a few select establishments¹⁹ that aligned to a local and seasonal food ethos.²⁰ By the late 20th century, wild in the context of restaurant food was associated predominantly with wild salmon, wild duck, wild mussels, wild boar, and wild plant foods that were often categorised as collectives – wildflowers and wild berries.²¹ By this time, too, the everyday practice of collecting wild food was a thing of the past and, if practiced at all, it was directed largely at blackberries and field mushrooms with limited coastal collection of seaweed. The decline in food and culinary connections to wild plants brought about an erosion in knowledge and skills required in identifying and using wild resources, even amongst rural communities who exercised caution and suspicion around all but the most identifiable and trusted wild-plant foods. Although by the 1980s, the novelty of a lamb, wild garlic, tansy, and earth nuts dish, created for the 1984 *Córas Beostoic agus Feola* ('Irish Livestock and Meat Board'), and the *Bord Fáilte* ('Irish Tourism Board') sponsored cookery competition, 'A Taste of Ireland', prompted the appearance of an *Irish Independent* newspaper column under the headline: 'Making a meal out of a new taste experience.'²² The inclusion of wild garlic in the dish was clearly intended to create a sense of identity for Irish food in serving industry and tourism, but the column itself is concerned with the unsettling turnover of food fashions since the 1970s. At a subliminal level, the reference to wild garlic serves to amplify the significant scale and pace of change to food systems that had occurred since the post-World War 2 period, with the emergence of a policy, technology, and a science-based model of production.

The cultural and counter-cultural expressions of these changes infiltrated consumer, media, health, industry and culinary realms, with discourse often set around feelings of insecurity and distrust,²³ and anchored in culture-turn academic polemics of

19 For example, in county Cork, Assolas Country House, and Ballymaloe Country House, and see also following note.

20 See, for instance, *The Irish Times* (4 May 1991), 10.

21 See in this context the *Bridgestone Irish Food Guide* (1991–2012) and *John & Sally McKenna's Irish Food Guides*; John and Sally McKenna began their authoritative Irish food guides in 1989 at a time when Irish restaurant culture was diversifying and artisan food-production culture was establishing itself in restaurant and farmers' market contexts. The late 20th century is often labelled as a 'Renaissance' period for Irish food as restaurants and alternative markets and their customers aligned to an AFN philosophy. Tracking wild food developments in their guidebooks over the last 35 years illustrates the growing profile of wild plants' food, including wild garlic, in Irish restaurant culture.

22 *The Irish Independent* (23 June 1984), 8 and *The Irish Independent* (3 July 1984), 7.

23 See, for instance, discussion by Peter Scholliers – 'Novelty and Tradition: The New Landscape for Gastronomy', in Paul Freedman ed.: *Food: A History of Taste* (California and London: University of California Press/Thames and Hudson, 2007), 332–357.

‘meaning’ and ‘meaning-making’. The emergence of social movements with a food focus, notably Slow Food in 1986, scaffolded the ethos of newly-forming AFNs. These emerging food philosophies intermeshed social, environmental and food justice, but they also sanctioned visitations to the past by ‘advocating historical food culture and by defending old-fashioned food traditions.’²⁴ Prioritised in these new food collectives were the elements of local, seasonal, and small-scale production, based on a tangible connection with place, people and tradition. In this paradigm, a selective, and, at times, an indiscriminate, use of the past popularised the history of food. By 2004, with the emergence of New Nordic Food (NNF) and the creation of what Larsen and Österlund-Pötzsch term a *superterrior* narrative²⁵ of purity and remoteness, wild food became an essential representative element of a food system untouched by human intervention, and by extension, its purity served narratives that created romanticised, if not mythologised, food identities.

This development saw the emergence of a new era of wild food and foraging and its associated integration into the culture of artisanal production and markets and *terroir*-based restaurants, and into communities of informed food-conscious consumers. In Ireland, a raft of NNF-effect developments recast wild food as beyond *de rigueur*; as resources of the wild, they were now tasked with responsibility for communicating multiple ‘meanings’. Embodied in wild food was the idea, if not the ideology, of authenticity, which was often viewed as a convergence of land, place, history and tradition, in line with the objectives of the NNF manifesto.²⁶ A burgeoning of the profiling and presence of wild garlic in multiple constructions unified food communities, and as the plant became a multi-functional icon of the movement, it assumed economic and identity roles. Wild garlic recipes appeared in cookbooks, especially in those of well-known chefs with a defined food philosophy, and it became a high-profile object in leisure wild-eccentric food events,²⁷ and it was integrated as an ingredient into small-scale artisan and speciality food production.²⁸

24 Slow Food Manifesto: An International Movement for the Defense of and the Right to Pleasure <https://www.slowfood.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/slow-food-manifesto.pdf>, accessed 10 August 2024.

25 Larsen, Hanne Pico and Österlund-Pötzsch, Susanne: ‘Foraging for Nordic Wild Food. Introducing Nordic Island *Terroir*’, in Lysaght, Patricia ed.: *The Return of Traditional Food* (Lund: Lund Studies in Arts and Cultural Sciences. Lund University, 2013) 68–78.

26 ‘The New Nordic Food Manifesto’, Nordic Co-operation: Nordic Council of Ministers <https://www.norden.org/en/information/new-nordic-food-manifesto>, accessed 10 August 2024.

27 See in this context, *The Irish Times* (14 April 2018), 26.

28 See, for instance, wild garlic pesto producers, Wild about Gibney’s Garden Preserves, Kildare, The Real Olive Company, Cork.

Heavily burdened, the plant was subject to a revision of its antiquity, and its role as a food resource was now extended from the Celtic to the post-Ice Age periods in popular appraisals, as evidence of the plant's enduring significance in Irish food culture.²⁹ This reconceptualising extended to academic work that proffered the study of placename evidence as a means of 'gaining a deeper insight into Irish culinary (and therefore cultural) heritage.'³⁰ Under the premise that the language of the landscape and its inclusion of food-related terms was a reliable indicator of past 'gastro' practice, placenames with *creamh* (wild garlic) were taken at face-value as culinary memory without accompanying interrogation of the complexities of placenaming conventions or consideration of the possible multiple reasons connecting the plant to landscape location.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Wild garlic has undergone a process of heritagisation based in part on evocations of the past that are considered useful and relevant to a variety of present-day food contexts. In popular and typical histories of the plant, wild garlic is cast in the pre-modern worlds of medieval and prehistoric Ireland. Here it functions as a food resource of the 'Celts' while its native-plant status is evoked in order to speculate about it being a food of the Island's earliest inhabitants. In such conjecturing, the relationship between plant and people in these pre-modern worlds, is uncomplicated by the impacts of market, and commercial and colonising forces. In this heritage-making for the plant, wild garlic serves as a return ticket to the past – the destination is a place where people, plant and nature have a close bond, and on return to the present, a recall of these elements holds value and potential in considerations of new, better or alternative ways with food.

In developing a pedigree for the plant, a selective approach to considering its history that often conflates the plant's native status with its language and landscape connections, has produced a fuzzy romanticised construction of its past. Such an approach echoes Lowenthal's summation of the emergence of heritage from the subsumption of different pasts to render a homogenised and 'general aura of

²⁹ See, for instance, *The Irish Times* (8 June 2019), 26.

³⁰ Mac Con Iomaire, Máirtín, 'Gastro-Topography: Exploring Food-Related Placenames in Ireland', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 381/2 (2014), 151. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43410726>> accessed 9 October 2024.

pastness.³¹ In Ireland, creating pastness for wild garlic brings with it curious similarities to the cultural movements of the late 19th century that sought a re-conquest of Irish culture with selective evocations of Ireland's Celtic past and Gaelic identity, which underpinned a creative intermeshing of landscape, language and 'peasant', to bring forward an essential Irishness that conceals historical details. This 're-discovery' of an Irish food identity located in the perceived purity of an Irish Golden Age, neglects the important realities that explain the plant's role as a seasonally-anticipated and substitution food in a subsistence economy. Furthermore, this process of heritagisation fails to address changes in the status of the plant through time, that explain the decline in its culinary uses in contrast to the survival of its medicinal applications, into the twentieth century. This present-day treatment of the plant produces a very particular type of entangled Celtic/Gaelic 'Irishness' food identity, not unlike the cultural and cultural-political movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This style of reclaiming the past promotes a sense of Ireland's exceptionalism as inferred in a review of the first Wild and Free Slow Food festival in county Wicklow in 2011, which was appraised as 'unique as a worldwide festival; indeed, it is probably only in Ireland that such an event can take place given our abundance of wild green leaves, flowers, berries, nuts, wild mushrooms, wild game and fish.'³²

This seemingly arbitrary and discriminatory approach in assigning value to some important historical details while neglecting or forgetting others, brings to mind Ronström's discussion of the concept of mindscape:

some things are actively selected, foregrounded, others are neglected and overlooked as they establish a certain perspective or gaze that makes us see a few things and to overlook a whole lot more. Mindscapes are institutionalised in 'domains', large networks of interlinked practices, ideas, artifacts, institutions etc.³³

In the case of wild garlic, the convergence of several elements, including the selective and speculative reading of the historical sources and the accompanying formation of a romantic food-past, together with an endless circulation of borrowings almost *ad*

31 Lowenthal, David: *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 138.

32 White-Lennon, Biddy: 2012. 'Slow and Wild Fest 2012', 3 October 2012. <<https://www.irishfoodwritersguild.ie/wild-and-slow-fest-2012/>> accessed 17 September 2024.

33 Ronström, Owe: 'Memories, Tradition, Heritage', in Ronström, Owe and Palmenfelt, Ulf eds.: *Memories and Visions* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2005), 91.

verbum from the work of Lucas and Kelly,³⁴ mixed up with an inheritance of external wild food trends from the 1970s, has produced a particular mindscape for the plant that has multiple useful applications. Such truncated pasts can advance the agendas of food and tourism industries, that are sensitive to changing fashions and trends and to a wave of consumer reaction in mediating food-systems change. In this context, wild garlic is an ideal candidate to be elevated as an emblem of a ‘good’ and ‘better’ way with food. Here the creation of value for wild garlic resonates with the more intimate and intrinsic concerns of consumers as they grapple with engaging in a meaningful or alternative way with food. At a micro level, wild garlic allows conscientious and informed food consumers and communities to connect with the grander philosophies of food movements and AFNs where the loci of engagement can vary from restaurant to festival, to farmers’ market, to woodland. These different spaces allow for the expression of a diversity of often emotionally-charged psychosocial performances – human to human connection, human to wilderness connection, human to past connection, and human to alternative food-system connection – in the conceptualised and trustworthy environments of nature and heritage.³⁵ Head chef and proprietor, Denis Cotter, outlines the multifaceted role wild garlic plays in the space of his acclaimed vegetarian restaurant:³⁶

Of the staff who collect/forage:

the guy who collects it, feels really good about it. He knows where to get it, he collects it, he brings it in. He feels like he’s more than part of the machine than just being the chef who shows up and chops up stuff [...] makes them feel like they’re involved in something more authentic [...] it gives a better sense of purpose to the people involved.

The consumer:

they feel that they’re having an authentic experience and they’re not throwing their money carelessly at some fraud [...] And then in some ways I feel sorry for consumers who are trying to buy in good conscience because it is such a minefield, and they know that it is. And I’d say they know that they’re just taking a wild swing at it half the time, and this will do. This is reasonably authentic, ultimately, it’s hard to tell who really is authentic and to what degree they are authentic.

34 For a fuller treatment, see Sexton, R.: ‘Wild Garlic in Irish Foodways: History, Memory and Tradition’, *Béascna 13: Iris Bhéaloideasa agus Eitneolaíochta/Journal of Folklore and Ethnology* (Cork: University College Cork 2025), 1–32.

35 For instance, *The Irish Times* (28 June 2005), 4; *The Irish Times* (4 May 2018), 17, and *The Irish Times* (1 April 2021), 46.

36 Personal Communication, 9 May 2024.

As a seasonal flag:

for a restaurant, it's a great signifier of spring. That's the big thing, so being able to put up big flags is important – squash says autumn, turnips say winter, asparagus and wild garlic say spring.

The story:

It's absolutely the story because you could make that flavour very easily without doing any foraging; it's urban chefs going out picking wild garlic to tell a story, to make themselves feel authentic and to then sell that story, the meaning that you're trying to convey, you just put wild garlic on the menu... wild garlic fills the narrative need.

The practical, symbolic and semiotic power of engaging with wild garlic is a contained and achievable way of dealing with the complex strata of postmodern food culture. To overcome these complexities, or at least to make them manageable, Cotter believes that for many in the food industry, producers and consumers, 'just one story will do.'³⁷ This light-touch connection with the intricacies of modern food systems transfers a heavy burden and responsibility to wild garlic. Ronström's summation of the macro and multiple functions of heritage can be applied to the micro case of the heritagisation of wild garlic and the creation of its multi-layered story. As a commonplace plant of the wild, it has a big job to do (Fig. 3). Yet, the fragmented heritage reconstructions of wild garlic, rather than being a holistic and diachronic analysis, undermine the potential of the historical record to serve as a tool for understanding social and environmental problems and the complexities of social, behavioural, and cultural change around food, in the face of modernity. In the partial construction of wild garlic's past in the present, nothing is heard of its earlier decline. The fate of the plant over time is not explored as an example of society engaging pragmatically with modernity, a development which ruptured and dislocated many Irish food traditions. The resultant complicated pathways of inheritance resulted in an ongoing and dual process of tradition-shedding and tradition-reformation. In this process, wild garlic has the potential to tell this enigmatic story based on a fuller treatment of history and an analysis of the dynamic nature of tradition, thereby serving as a site of learning in seeking to understand the nature and causes of food changes through time. However, the dominance of its heritage-status narrative and its circulation inside certain socio-demographics, suppresses a more considered and inclusive evaluation of the many socio-cultural perspectives that assigned it a disparate value and a variable relevance through time.

³⁷ Personal communication, 9 May 2024.

Ronström	Wild Garlic/Ireland	Types and Uses of Pastness	Concepts/Themes	Touching on Reflexive Modernity
Heritage creates/reinforces identities	Wild, unspoilt, green, marginal, pure land/terroir	Early Irish Literature. Folklore	Resonance with 'Celtic' past, Renaissance, retrieval and revivals Distorting the past and elements of presentism	Using history and tradition to imagine an alternative or aspirational 'better' environmental realities for present and future Touching environmental governance
Heritage creates stability in a world marked by increasing tempo of life, faster changes, fragmentation and decreasing continuity in people's lives/worlds	In touch with nature, sense of safety and well-being Emotional/affective/spiritual: communities of practice & shared worldviews	Recalling everyday life in the past with shared connections to ancestral people, land, place	Alterity Authenticity Trust Ancestral knowledge Elements of the spiritual	Reaction to rapid social change/transformation of food system Simplicity in the face of complexity and confusion of choice Meaningful cognitive and philosophical connections with past and nature Environmental and food movements
Heritage is aesthetic compensation for structural, cultural, and/or economical marginality or deprivation	Connection to beauty of wild garlic's habitat underpinned by highlighting of its native plant status Aesthetic affect and sensory impact in cooking, vibrant colour, and decorative qualities of flowers	Place and space of pre-modern food systems Recognition of the beauty of nature and natural foods v 'modern' foods	Affective Spiritual capital Seasonality	New religion The outsider made insider Environmental movement
Heritage is a result of a general growth of interest in history in times of economic recession	Material connection-economic spillover/bolster to food and tourism industries Creates identity with various economic applications	All subsumed pasts (Lowenthal)	Knowledge-making & makers Makers of heritage & resultant economic capital	Prompts discussion/alignment to environmental modernisation
Heritage is an answer to (post/late) modern processes that promote play and experience, a general development 'from informative to performative.	Foraging and wild-centric events Home cooking and wild garlic dishes Participation in restaurant culture Communication/performance via social media	Tied to 'Celtic' festivals Wild garlic and St. Bridgid's Day Champ Wild garlic and butter- May Day	Performative Real, staged or imagined Time traveling Cultural-food capital	The storied self

Tabl. 2. Wild garlic: what does heritage

It is the messy denser story of wild garlic, rather than the mythologised and heritage one that holds potential for the effecting of transformative engagement with the pressing social, cultural and environmental considerations of present and future food systems.

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