



In 1946, Ireland's Bantry House became the first private manor in the country to be opened to the public. Today, these grand estates are a major tourist draw. DEAN JOBB FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

THE EMERALD ISLE

FOUR MANORS AND A CASTLE

Get inside the opulent monster homes of Ireland's landed gentry – the English Protestants – who couldn't outbuild each other fast enough

DEAN JOBB DUBLIN

Long before armchair renovators began tuning in to the TV show *Build a New Life in the Country*, Ireland's ruling class was peppering the landscape with massive country homes and château-style castles surrounded by ornate gardens.

It's a rich architectural legacy, remnants of an age when getting away from it all was easy – if you had it all to begin with.

"No streak of Puritan modesty restrained [those] for whom these houses were being built," note the authors of *Irish Houses & Castles*. "Local rivalries, jealousy, and family pride had their effect on the architecture – people were ruined in the attempt to out-build one another."

Having it all during Ireland's home-and-garden building boom of the 1700s and 1800s meant being a member of the English-Protestant aristocracy in a country where almost everyone was Catholic and relegated to tenant farms and wee, thatched cottages. To Irish nationalists, these grand homes were symbols of British oppression, and a few became the target of IRA attacks during The Troubles. Today, they're a major tourist draw. The government owns and operates dozens of estates and many of those in private hands are open to the public.

Ireland, Page 4