



GTTP

Fáilte Ireland

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ALDO PAPONE AWARD 2008

# OAK PARK

## DEMESNE & FOREST WALK

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

by  
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Knockbeg College, Carlow, Ireland

**ALDO PAPONE AWARD 2008**

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by

Henry Roberts and Robert Power

Co-ordinated by Jarlath Bolger



# Preface

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When we were presented with the task of documenting a case study of responsible tourism development, we were faced with several options. After numerous discussions, we finally decided that the Oak Park demesne and forest walk, County Carlow, seemed to be a suitable subject on which to focus. It is close to our school, both of us know it well, it is a recently developed tourist attraction and it helps maintain the environment of the area.

The following case study is the result of months of research, analysing data and interviewing various sources. It is the product of the hard work and dedication of ourselves and all those involved.

This case study highlights the potential of the Oak Park demesne and forest walk as a significant eco- and nature-tourism attraction for Carlow, and indeed the South-East region of Ireland. It shows how an otherwise unused piece of land can be converted to educate people about the environment in an informal setting. It also highlights how the house, which is currently occupied by Teagasc, the national Agricultural Research institute, has been restored and maintained to a high standard of repair, unlike so many other mansions around the country.

The forest park walk attracts a large number of national and international tourists each year and it is hoped that it will continue to do so, in increasing numbers, in the years to come.

# Original Essay Entry

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*This is the original essay that we submitted for the Aldo Papone Award 2008. In it, we outlined several issues about the environmental sustainability of a forest walk and surround area with which we were familiar. It also highlighted the historical significance of the house of the estate on which the forest walk lies. We hoped that this was enough to demonstrate an interesting case study under the title "Responsible Tourism Development". Sure enough, this case study was picked to represent Ireland at the GTTP International Student/Teacher Exchange in Nice, France in November 2008.*

What is responsible tourism development? We think that it is the development of an area through which the local people, businesses, infrastructure, and, most importantly, the *environment* benefits. In today's world, the environment is constantly under threat. A lot of development is associated with pollution and changes which are detrimental to the environment. However, it is possible to develop a tourist attraction that aids and monitors the improvement of the natural habitats in the immediate area.

The location we have chosen to write about for this case study is the Oak Park demesne; an estate now owned by Teagasc (the Irish Agricultural Institute). The 800-acre estate is situated approximately three kilometres north of Carlow town, in the south-east of Ireland, and is surrounded by farmland and private detached houses. The estate has had a colourful history, with the former family being involved in Anglo-Irish politics since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This history, along with the existence of many of the estate's original features, such as the gateway and mausoleum, and the large areas of land make it ideal for a cultural and environmental tourist attraction.

The Oak Park demesne was bought by Colonel Henry Bruen I in 1775, after making his fortune in the American Army. Henry I was the grandson of James Bruen of Tarvin, who came to Ireland with Oliver Cromwell and received land at Abbeyboyle, Co. Roscommon. Henry I quickly amassed the land surrounding Oak Park. In 1841, a survey of every Bruen

farm revealed that the family's estates in County Carlow covered an enormous 20,089 acres. All this land gave the Bruen family political power, and in 1790 Henry I was returned to parliament, winning the seat of a neighbouring family, the Butlers. However, the Butlers reclaimed their seat five years later with the sudden death of the Colonel in December 1795.

This allowed his son, Henry II to assume power of the estate. Henry II attended Harrow public school in England, alongside the poet Lord Byron and Robert Peel, with whom he would serve as a Conservative (Tory) MP. Peel was the Home Secretary at the time of Catholic Emancipation, a Bill which Henry II supported. In the 1841 election, Henry defeated Liberal candidate Daniel O'Connell, Jnr., son of "The Liberator". However, the Bruen hold on the seat lapsed with the death of Henry II in 1852, but his son Henry III returned to the House of Commons in 1857, and held his seat until 1880, which marked the end of the family's 90-year history of political involvement over three generations.

The current mansion at Oak Park is the result of four periods of expansion and remodelling carried out between 1797 and 1902. Twenty-two years after he arrived, Henry I employed Michael Boylan to redecorate the house. In 1832, Henry II commissioned William Morrison to remodel the house and in 1876 Samuel Bolton, a builder, signed a contract for a major extension, which took three years to complete. However, on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1902 the house was gutted by fire. After eight hours of fighting the blaze, all that remained was the north wing. Fortunately, a large number of paintings, furniture and books were saved by the workers. The house was rebuilt under the supervision of William Mitchell.

The last Bruen, Henry V, died in 1954. By then, the estate had reduced in size to a relatively small 1,500 acres, and was valued at £80,000. He left nothing to his estranged wife, Gladys, who had left him several years earlier to marry a Montenegrin prince, Milo Petrovic-Njegos. The remainder of the estate was bequeathed to a cousin in England, bar a weekly income, for life, of £6 to his daughter, Patricia.



In September 1957, the estate was purchased at auction for £50,555 by Brownes Hill Estates, who already owned the nearby estate in which a Norfolk farmer was principal partner. However, within three years the property was back on the market after fierce protest from smaller farmers in opposition to the purchase by the Norfolk farmer. The estate was bought by the Land Commission for £68,000, and seven hundred acres were divided up among small holders, while the house and the remaining land were taken over as a research centre for the Agricultural Institute (now Teagasc). The last member of the Bruen family to be buried in the family's private burial ground at the Mausoleum was Gladys, the estranged wife of Henry V, who died in March 1969.

With all this land, as well as the mansion, Oak Park has the potential to become one of Carlow's major tourist attractions. Anglo-Irish history has become increasingly important in recent years, and if the Teagasc research centre were to be relocated, the house could be restored to its former glory and opened to the public for tours. This would also allow for tourists, scholars and local school children to learn more about Anglo-Irish affairs through the Bruen's involvement in politics, as well as seeing what life was like many years ago. Restored houses always prove popular with tourists. By restoring the house, Anglo-Irish and local history could be preserved physically, and not just documented in the annals that time will eventually forget.

One cannot, of course, forget the land that surrounds the house. This has the potential to be developed into a natural wonderland. Carlow County Council, together with Teagasc, has already opened several walk routes through the 124-acre forest and by the lake, the longest of which runs for approximately three miles. This has proved extremely popular as a park with the residents of Carlow and its environs. Had this park not been opened, the land was at risk of being deforested and developed into residential units.

This park not only preserves fine examples of native plant species, but also provides a habitat for a wide range of wildlife, such as birds, bats, insects, squirrels, foxes and badgers. From a tourism perspective, this has the potential to attract nature enthusiasts, in particular ornithologists, as there is a wide variety of birds to be observed within the forest canopy and around the lake. The River Barrow is also known for its wide variety of species of birds at various times of the year. This is rarely, if ever, mentioned as a tourist attraction in Carlow.

The sizeable lake, which is situated in front of the mansion, could also be stocked with native species of fish, making it an attraction for angling tourism. This lake, in conjunction with the Rivers Barrow, Burrin, Greese and Lerr, could be used as a marketing label for the area. The development of Carlow as a world-class fishing area would serve two purposes: the first is that it would bring international anglers to the area, generating economic benefits for the local towns and villages; the second benefit is that the fish and anglers would provide a monitoring system for pollution. If pollution were to occur, its presence would soon become apparent by the numbers of fish being caught. Fishermen are known for their vociferous response when fish stocks are affected by pollution. The investment involved would be minimal. This would entail fish stocks being introduced to the waterways and the lake at Oak Park. The lake would also require greater access, with the provision of fishing jetties.

As we can see from the suggestions made in this case study, Carlow has enormous potential to become a major tourist location, with the area benefitting not only economically, but also environmentally.





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# Introduction

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In recent years, Ireland has experienced unprecedented growth in its economy. The quality of life for the vast majority of the country's inhabitants has improved enormously, so much so that citizens of other countries have emigrated here to start better lives. This increase in wealth has also led to the improvement of the country's infrastructure, with the government building vast road networks and public transport systems. These have proved to be very wise investments, with travelling times between major towns and cities being reduced considerably. However, as with many good things, there are consequences. The increase of people travelling has led to growing pollution levels. This, combined with moderate deforestation, has led to damage to the environment.

For this reason, we decided to take an environmental approach to "Responsible Tourism Development". We wanted to see what was being done in our area to protect the environment and nature. This led us to Oak Park. The forest walk that has been created by Carlow County Council has gone a long way to protect wildlife and plants in the area, as well as raise awareness amongst the people of Carlow about various environmental issues.

However, as we conducted our research, we found that the history of the former Oak Park demesne was such that it could not be ignored, and so we decided to include the historical aspects of the park as well. The richly textured and turbulent story behind the Bruen family should be preserved for future generations.

Overall, Oak Park is the ideal subject to demonstrate responsible tourism development. Hopefully, we will show you these aspects in the following booklet and show Oak Park's potential has to become a major tourist attraction.

# Why Oak Park?

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There were many different and varying reasons why we decided to choose the Oak Park Forest Walk as the focal point of our project. All of these specific inspirations resulted in us reaching the conclusion that the Oak Park Forest Walk was the most suitable resource in our locality on which to base our project.

In reality, the Forest Walk was in contention from the moment we heard the title and genre of the competition. A limited knowledge of the history of the estate, combined with our fondness of the park itself, ensured that the prospect of an Oak Park-based report was always in the reckoning. We would be delighted to be given the opportunity to promote one of the lesser-known Irish tourist attractions. Being regular visitors to the park prior to the competition would give us a great advantage in composing our original essay; it would give us a head start in many respects.

Our primary reason for choosing Oak Park was due to the strong relationship between our school, St. Mary's Knockbeg College, and Oak Park. Apart from being located less than two kilometres away from Oak Park, there were many other close links between our school and the amenity. For instance, Oak Park was continually referred to in the modules we studied during our Transition Year history course.

Upon further investigation of the suitability of Oak Park, we identified a number of potentially beneficial, personal connections between staff at our school and individuals who were heavily involved in the recent prosperity of the park. For example, the Rector of our school, Fr. Micheál Murphy is of close acquaintance with Mr. Tom Kirley, Director of Administration at the Oak Park Research Centre. This Research Centre, which now occupies Oak Park House, also acts as the national headquarters of Teagasc (Agriculture Institute). In addition to this, Connie Conway, Administrative Officer at Oak Park, is an aunt of Mr. Chris Conway, a long-established teacher in our school.

These convenient and invaluable links were complimented by the wide range of documentation available to us, providing a wealth of information on both past and present times on the Oak Park estate. We knew the Internet would be a fountain of facts for whatever subject we decided to study, but, ultimately, we decided that Oak Park was the best choice, partly due to the sheer volume of knowledge available from local libraries and historians. This would allow us to give a more accurate and detailed account of the park.

Given the potential to compose a very professional and substantial project, thanks to all the aforementioned resources, all that remained to be done was to examine the

relevance of the Oak Park Forest Walk to the title of the project: “Responsible Tourism Development”. Immediately, any doubt that lingered regarding this aspect of the chosen subject was put to rest. With the current, worldwide, political climate regarding global warming and environmental protection being what it is, there was absolutely no question that the development of the Forest Walk was a topical and socially significant issue.

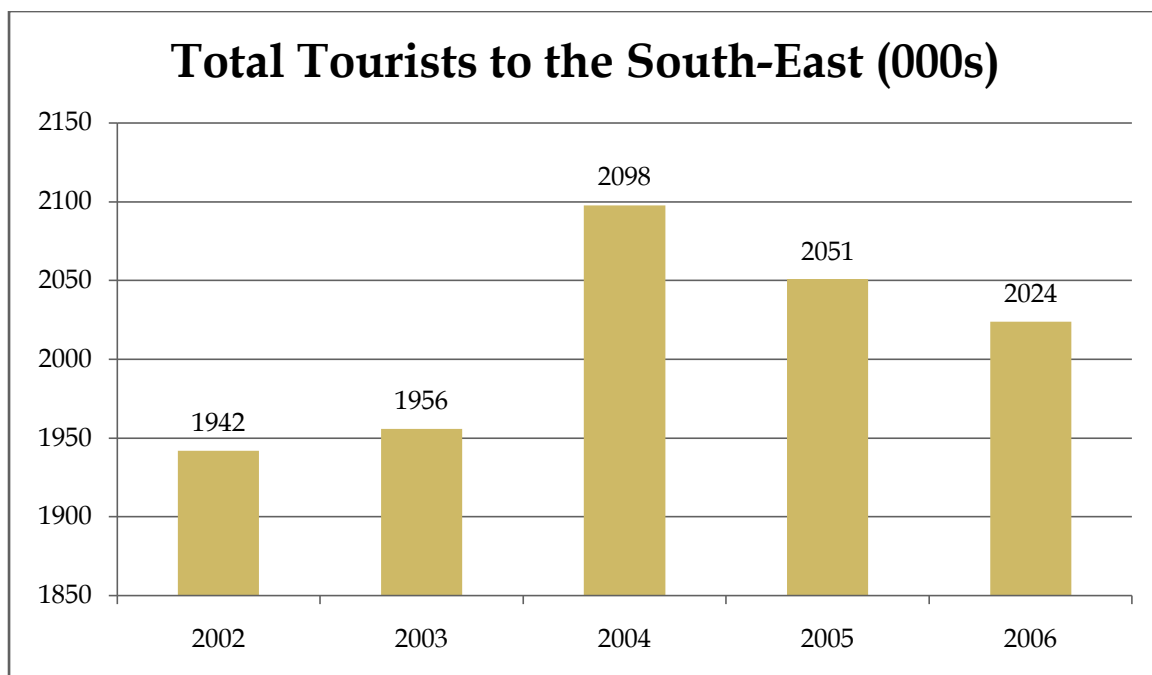
The sensitivity towards protecting the environment and combating climate change would mean that this was the optimum time for development. The Oak Park Forest Walk would be a non-polluting, eco-friendly and clean tourist attraction, which is very rare in today’s technological and industrial world.

The development of the Oak Park Forest Walk is an exquisite example, at home and abroad, of how to carry out responsible tourism development and that is the main reason why we chose the Oak Park Forest Walk as the basis for our report.

# Tourism Statistics

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When tourists think of Ireland, they almost immediately think of the West of Ireland, with its dry-stone walls, whitewashed cottages and wave-beaten cliffs, or Dublin, the capital city, with its political past, lively nightlife and numerous cultural institutions. They often forget about the hidden treasures of the South-East of the island, which has many attractions for history enthusiasts, nature lovers, anglers, walkers and adventurers. The South-East (made up of Counties Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford) boasts some of the best freshwater fishing rivers, hill walking, water sports and walking amenities in the country, with scenic river walks, guided hill trails and numerous marina towns situated on the banks of its four main waterways.



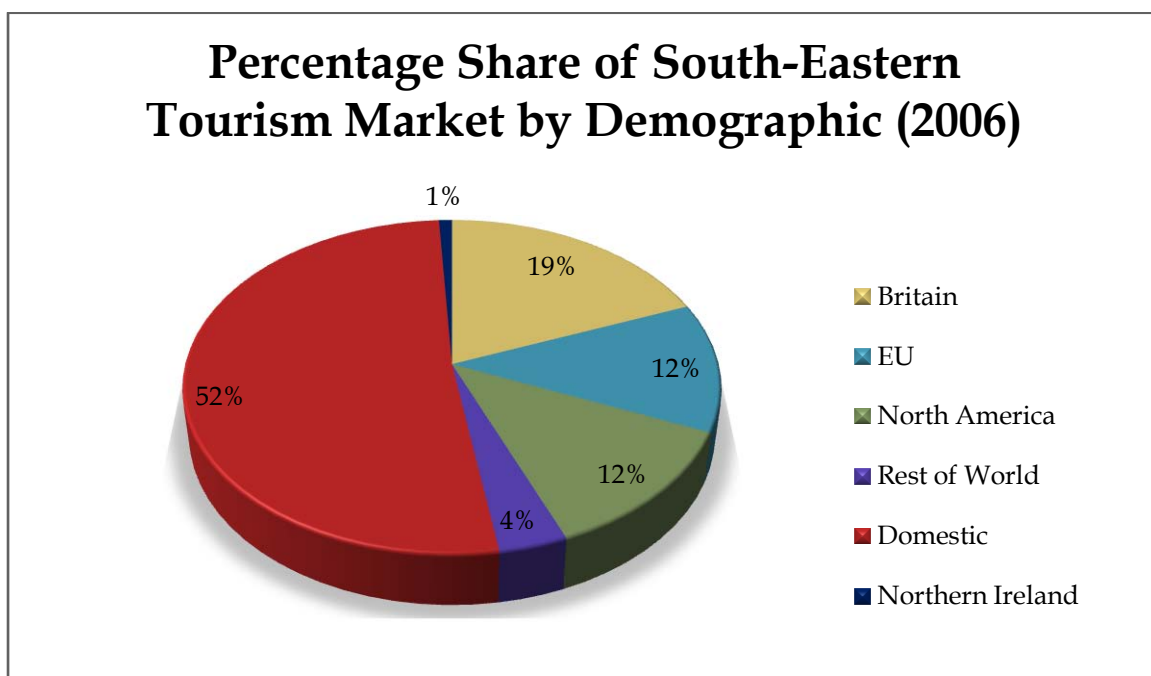
As can be seen from the chart above, there has been an 8% increase in the number of tourists visiting the South-East region in the 2002-2006 period. However, over the last few years there has been a slight decrease (3.5% on 2004 figures) in numbers due to the slowing growth in the world economy. Thankfully, though, this has not significantly affected growth in the South-East, with two new major hotel chains opening in Carlow in the last two years alone.

Of course, one must then ask the question: from where have these tourists come? It is important to establish whether they are domestic tourists (those who live in Ireland, but are visiting another part of the country) or international tourists (those who live in another country and are visiting Ireland). This kind of data is important to the







Irish tourist board (Fáilte Ireland), as it allows them to adjust marketing campaigns accordingly, both in the domestic and international markets.

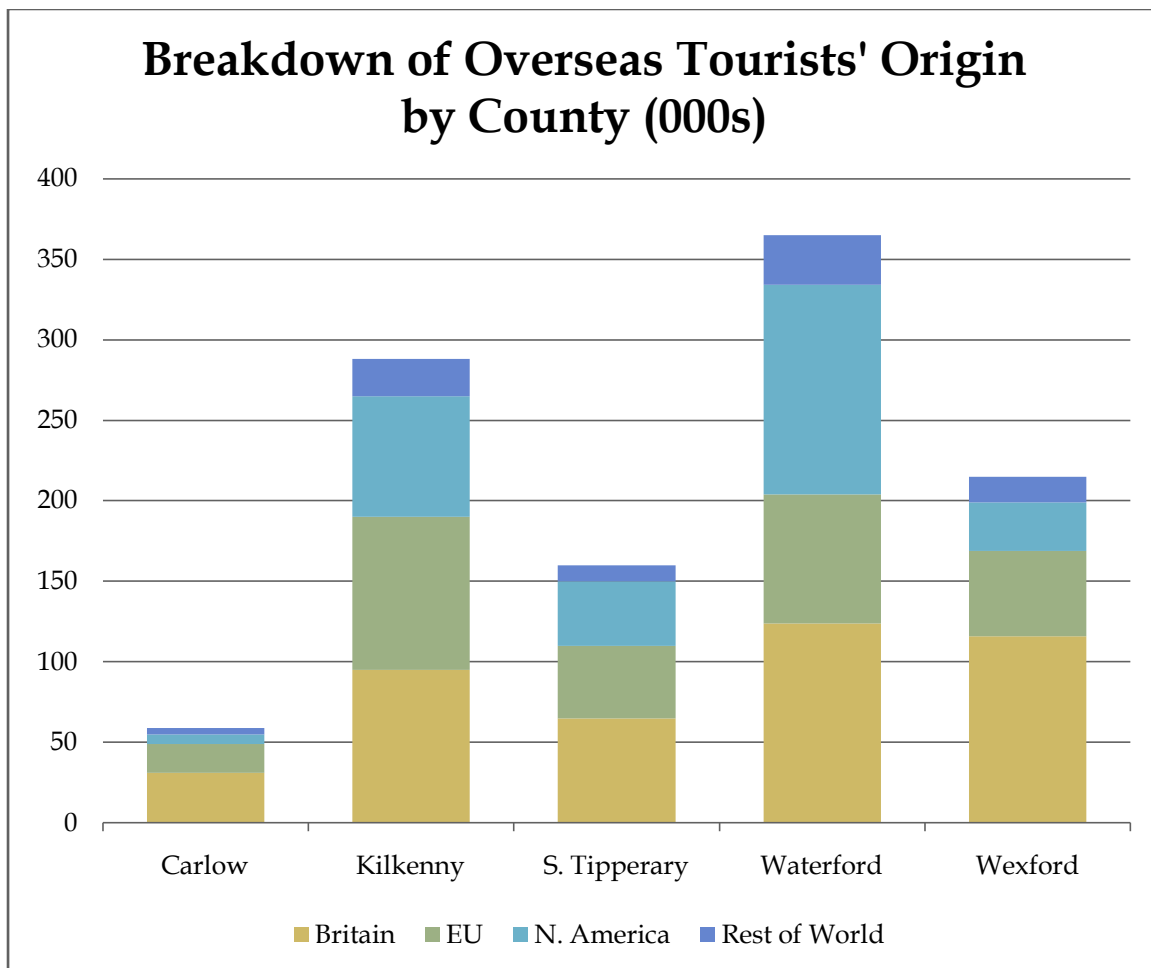
		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	Britain	463	425	479	432	384
	EU	199	205	217	246	253
	North America	202	227	222	209	251
	Rest of the World	46	48	56	56	74
<b>Total Overseas Tourists</b>		<b>910</b>	<b>905</b>	<b>974</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>962</b>
	Domestic Tourism	1,024	1,042	1,113	1,099	1,044
	Northern Ireland	8	9	11	9	18
<b>Total Tourists</b>		<b>1,942</b>	<b>1,956</b>	<b>2,098</b>	<b>2,051</b>	<b>2,024</b>



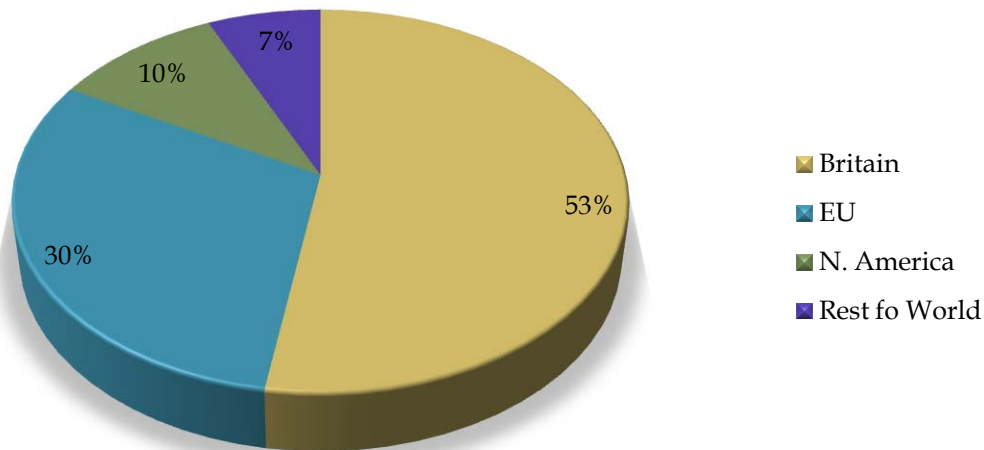
It can be seen clearly from the table and chart above that domestic tourists make up the majority of tourism in the South-East, accounting for 52% of the market share. The next largest sector is Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the United Kingdom), making up about 20% of the market, followed by the EU and North America, both accounting for approximately 12% of the market each. Further analysis of these

figures show the breakdown of tourists to each county. These statistics are important, as they illustrate the popularity of each county in the South-East. The following figures are taken from a 2006 survey)

<b>Breakdown of Overseas Tourist Numbers by County (000s)</b>		<b>Carlow</b>	<b>Kilkenny</b>	<b>S. Tipperary</b>	<b>Waterford</b>	<b>Wexford</b>
	Britain	31	95	65	124	116
	EU	18	95	45	80	53
	North America	6	75	40	130	30
	Rest of World	4	23	10	31	16
<b>Total Overseas Tourists</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>215</b>



## Breakdown of Tourists' Origin Visiting County Carlow



As can be seen by the table and bar chart on the previous page, County Carlow has the smallest portion of the market for the South-East - only 6% of tourists visiting the South-East region of Ireland visit County Carlow. These small numbers are due to several reasons.

Firstly, Carlow is a landlocked county and therefore does not support a seaside tourist industry. In contrast, this is the main form of tourism for Counties Waterford and Wexford and would attract a lot of families. Because Carlow can't capitalise on this feature, it is at a serious disadvantage regarding family-oriented activities.

Secondly, County Carlow's population is the smallest in the South-East, at just over 50,000 people<sup>1</sup>. This is less than half of the largest population in the South-East, which is found in County Wexford (approx. 132,000). Because of this, there are not enough people to support a large tourist industry, in both primary and ancillary sectors.

Also, compared to the other four counties in the South-East, Carlow has relatively few tourist attractions. Both Kilkenny and Waterford have major cities, each with its unique and turbulent history. Kilkenny in particular, which was once the stronghold of the powerful Butler family, is home to several magnificent castles and monasteries. Wexford has one of the oldest ports in Europe, dating back to Viking times (approx. AD 800). Tipperary was the site of several rebellions between Irish revolutionaries and British forces over the last 800 years, and so has many war museums.

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<sup>1</sup> All populations figures taken from the Official 2006 Population Census

Finally, Carlow has not advertised itself as a tourist destination until recently. The reasons for this are unclear; however, in the last few years there has been a concerted effort to promote County Carlow to foreign markets. It is hoped that tourist numbers will pick up in the next few years and will conform to the average of the other four counties in the South-East region.

# The History of Oak Park

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## The Cooke Family

Robert Cooke came to Ireland in the late 1500s and settled near Carlow. He was descended from Sir Edmond Cooke, Lord Chief Justice of England. He married Griselle O'Moore who owned substantial land property in Painstown (later Oak Park) and Ullard. Upon doing so, he changed his religion and thereafter the Cookes remained Catholic. Griselle's family were closely connected with Carlow Castle and it is most likely that Painstown was part of the parklands of the Castle.



Figure 1: The remains of Carlow Castle

There is little recorded data about the Cookes at Painstown, but there is evidence suggesting that their lands at Ullard were confiscated around the time of the Cromwellian Plantation of Ireland (1649). It is probable that at least some the Painstown property was forfeited to Oliver Cromwell. It was also around this time that the family changed the spelling of their name from "Coke" to "Cooke". The following account, which was passed down through family records explains why this happened:

*"Charles Coke at the time of the persecution by Cromwell in Ireland, in order to save his life and estate, by adding an O to his name did claim kindred to John Cook, then Solicitor-General and a great favourite of Cromwell, by whose interest he saved his life and Painstown but Ullard was forfeited. Since that time the Painstown family have continued to write their name with two Os."*

An inscription on an old tomb at the Cooke's burial ground at Oak Park shows that the last Cooke was buried there in 1861. The late Cardinal Terence James Cooke,



Figure 2: Sir Oliver Cromwell

Archbishop of New York, who died in 1984, was descended from the Cookes of Painstown.

### Henry Bruen I

Oak Park (formerly known as Painstown) was purchased from the Cooke family in 1775 by Henry Arthur Bruen I. Bruen was the grandson of James Bruen of Tarvin, County Chester, England, who came to Ireland with the army of Oliver Cromwell. Because of his honourable services to Cromwell and his army, James Bruen was granted land at Abbeyboyle, County Roscommon and this is where the Bruen connection with Ireland began.

Henry arrived in Carlow following a career in the Quarter Master General's office in the U.S. Army, where he accumulated his vast fortune. However, the way in which Henry obtained his wealth was often called into question by political enemies of the family in years to come. For example, one story claims that while Henry was responsible for supplying coffins, he had them manufactured with false bottoms, facilitating recycling!



Figure 3: A typical scene in the American War of Independence.

Despite the stories, Bruen certainly had a fortune. Throughout the 1790s, he took multiple opportunities to expand his power in Carlow, taking advantage of the forced sales of three of the largest estates in the county (i.e. those owned by the Bagenal, Whaley and Grogan families). This vast ownership of land also gave Henry great political

power. In 1790, he was returned to parliament in an uncontested election. Many of the surrounding Ascendancy families were not pleased with this, seeing it as unfair. However, these complaints were put to rest on 14th December 1795, when Henry Bruen I suddenly died at his Dublin home.



## Henry Bruen II

After his father's death, Henry II took hold of the Bruen dominance in politics in Carlow. He attended Harrow, an exclusive English private school, the same time as George Gordon Byron (later the poet Lord Byron) and soon-to-be British Prime Minister Robert Peel, with whom he would rub shoulders with as fellow Tory MPs<sup>2</sup>. Sir Robert was Home Secretary (Minister of Justice) at the time of Catholic Emancipation.



Figure 4: Sir Robert Peel, Prime Minister of Great Britain 1834-1846

Henry Bruen II was first elected to Parliament unopposed in 1812, at the age of 22. This was the first of 13 elections in which he took part over 40 years. He was returned unopposed in four, he topped the poll in six, and of the remaining three in which he was defeated, he successfully appealed one of them and gained the seat against the odds. Henry was seen at times a political maverick, particularly when he supported the bill for Catholic Emancipation. Catholic Emancipation, which was granted in 1829, lifted laws and restrictions against Catholics in Ireland, allowing them freedom of movement, practice of religion and the right to trade in markets. Despite coming from a long line of Protestant Conservatives (Tories), Henry

II supported this bill, along with several other MPs. This was very unusual, as the Conservative Party, as a whole, did not. Yet despite this political turmoil within the party during the 1830s, with the exception of two brief intervals, Henry II retained his seat from 1840 until his death in 1852.

However, it was not until the 1841 election that Henry Bruen II became a hero amongst Conservative voters throughout the country. He, partnered Thomas Banbury, to defeated the high-profile Daniel O'Connell, Jr.<sup>3</sup> and John Ashton Yates. The win was made all the sweeter when it was announced that out of a total poll of 2,804, only 18 votes separated the two sides.

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<sup>2</sup> "Tory" is an informal word used to describe a member of the Conservative Party in Britain. An MP is a member of the House of Commons (British Parliament).

<sup>3</sup> Daniel O'Connell, Sr., also known as "The Liberator" led the Catholic Emancipation Bill in 1827 and is regarded as one of the most important figures in Irish history.



Daniel O’Connell, Jr. had led a campaign in Carlow, addressing dozens of meetings with the advice:

“Form a liberal club in every parish... agitate... but violate no law... commit no riot... The least approach to either turbulence or violence would make me abandon the contest”.

According to this speech, the Liberals saw intimidation as an acceptable weapon. At a gathering in Carlow town, O’Connell suggested the use of cribs or pens in churches where Catholic voters, who refused to join the Liberal side, could be corralled during Mass ceremonies to undermine their support for landlords<sup>4</sup>. O’Connell must have known that such demeaning and isolating actions would lead to violence. “Cooping” was another form of protection deployed on both sides. This method resulted in voters being locked up by their own party to prevent them being intimidated or physically attacked by followers of the opposing party. Abduction was also practised to prevent voters getting to the voting polls.

On 26<sup>th</sup> June 1841, five days before the election, more than 250 Catholic voters, armed to a man, were under the protection of a squadron of cavalry at Borris House, situated in the south of County Carlow. Few of these abductions were reported to the police, which suggests that most of the Catholics in question were there out of their own free will. It is impossible to determine whether it was out of fear of their landlord or clan loyalty.

The battle for seats was becoming increasingly intense between the two sides and this was evident judging by the extent to which each party was willing to go to protect their potential voters. However, it was through the medium of print that most of the trouble was stirred up with the papers representing the two sides, exaggerating and misrepresenting the facts for propaganda purposes.

The clergy in most parishes in the county, led by Bishop James Doyle, were largely in support of the Liberal cause, and it was in light of this backing that Daniel O’Connell would advocate the use of cribs in churches as a form of punishment for the Catholic Tory voters

On Sunday, July 25<sup>th</sup> 1841, a crib was erected in the Catholic church in Tinryland, a small village 6km southeast of Carlow Town, for what were termed the “*black sheep who voted Tory*”. In mid-August, the children of James McMahon were rejected entry to the primary school in Rathoe, a village 10km east of Carlow Town, by the master,

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<sup>4</sup> At the time, many Catholics lived as tenant farmers, renting land off wealthy Protestant landlords, such as the Bruens.

being deemed “*young sheep who would disgrace the flock*”. Andrew Marshall, a Bruen tenant, was beaten by a mob while another Conservative supporter, Brian Kelly, was stoned by a mob of thirty.

Given the bitterness of the campaign (with religion being the main problem), the anger of Catholics afterwards was understandable. This defeat marked the beginning of another four decades of landlord domination of politics in the county.

There was no evidence of any landlord vengeance having taken place in the time after the election. However, for O’Connell and his followers, it seems that, for them, the campaign was quite a sectarian issue, given that almost all of the mob attacks had occurred within the proximity of churches throughout the county. It was felt that Catholic Conservative voters had betrayed not only their country, but also their religion.

Following his election success, Tory friends of Henry II made a collection towards a presentation to mark the victory. Instead, Henry insisted that the £2,000 collected should be used to construct a church in Carlow and that he would cover the costs of any shortfall and provide the finance to pay the rector. St. Anne’s Church had not been completed at the time of his death in 1852. In 1928, St. Anne’s, still in Bruen ownership but unused for some years by the Church of Ireland, was sold for a nominal sum and relocated in Graigcullen on the other side of the town. It now stands as St. Claire’s (Roman Catholic) Parish Church.

### Henry Bruen III

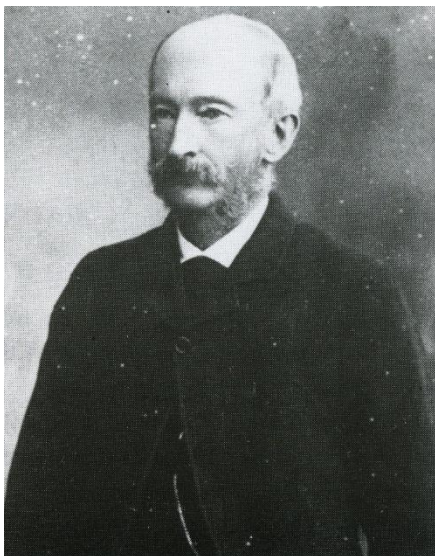


Figure 5: Henry Bruen III

Following the example set by his forefathers, Henry Bruen III (1828-1912) entered the realm of politics with a successful parliamentary reputation to maintain. After the death of Henry II, the family’s hold on a seat in parliament lapsed. However, five years later the Bruens had returned to the House of Commons, with Henry III winning a seat, which he would hold until 1880, when, partnered with Arthur McMurrrough-Kavanagh, he was heavily defeated by the Home Rule<sup>5</sup> candidates E.D. Gray and D.H. MacFarlane. That election was a key benchmark, not just for the Bruens - ending 90 years of family involvement in politics over three

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<sup>5</sup> The Home Rule movement sought to gain parliamentary independence for Ireland. Home Rule was achieved (to a degree) in 1919.

generations - but more significantly, it ended the domination of landlords on the national political system in Ireland.

## Henry IV



Figure 6: Henry Bruen IV

Not much is known about Henry Bruen IV. We know that he served in the First Boer War (1880-1881). He also leased land the Carlow Golf Club. His reign signified the beginning of the decline of the Bruen dynasty.

## Henry Bruen V



Figure 7: Henry and Gladys Bruen, c. 1930

Henry Bruen V married the love of his life, Miss Jane Catherine (Gladys) McClintock, daughter of Arthur McClintock of Rathvinden House, Leighlinbridge (a village 15km south of Carlow Town) on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1913. However, this love was not as strong and true as was first suspected. After 26 years of marriage, Gladys left Henry and eloped with a Montenegrin prince to Roundstone, Co. Galway, leaving Henry V to live out the rest of his life alone at Oak Park.

Prince Milo Petrovic-Njegos, a nephew of the former King Nicholas of Montenegro, was born in Montenegro in 1889. He was a

Brigadier-General during the First World War and led his division into Albania in 1916.

Prince Milo left England at the outbreak of the Second World War, and while staying with solicitor Samuel Roche and his wife at Bennekerry House, Carlow, he met Gladys Bruen.

When Prince Milo and Gladys eloped to Galway, they rented a small cottage. Having purchased the dwelling and the land that accompanied it, including 10 acres of shoreline and 70 acres of hill-land near Roundstone, the pair decided to construct a modest bungalow. From here, the Prince ran his worldwide business of trading paintings and coins. Villagers in Roundstone recalled that the couple remained uninvolved in community activities and kept mostly to themselves.



Figure 8: Prince Milo Petrovic-Njegos of Montenegro

Before Gladys left Henry in order to start a new life Prince Milo, they raised a daughter named Patricia. In 1939, Patricia married Mervyn Boyse of Bannow House, County Wexford (a county bordering Carlow in the southeast). Henry V strongly disapproved of this match. In his will, dated June 17th 1953, Henry Bruen V completely excluded his wife from inheriting an estate valued at £80,000 when he died in 1954. He left his daughter a weekly income of £6 for life. He left Oak Park House, the demesne of 1,500 acres (607ha.) on which it stood and most of his other assets to his first cousin, Francis Bruen, who was living in England. Patricia contested the will, but after a two-day hearing in the High Court, the action was dropped after a compromise was agreed upon between

both sides. (Mrs. Boyse would get a share of the money from the sale of the contents of the house.)

The property was auctioned in Dublin on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1957 and was purchased by Brownes Hill Estates for £50,555. Brownes Hill Estates already owned a nearby estate in which W.H. Harold, an extensive farmer in Norfolk, was principal partner. With this success, the sale of the contents took place four weeks later and was carried out over three days by Dublin auctioneers. The entire contents was sold for approximately £20,000.

However, within three years of the sale, the property was back on the market as a result of small farmers opposing the purchase by W.H. Harold. The property was then bought by the Land Commission for £68,000. Seven hundred acres (283ha.)



were divided among small holders, while the house and remaining land were taken over as a research centre by the Agricultural Institute (now Teagasc).

Henry Bruen V died in 1954. Several hundred of people, including clergy, politicians and neighbouring gentry families, followed the remains of Henry from St. Mary's Church in Carlow Town to his final resting place in the private family mausoleum at Oak Park.

As for his ex-wife Gladys, she lived out the rest of her days with the Prince. In March 1969, fifteen years after the death of Henry V, the last Bruen of Oak Park had passed away. Gladys Bruen was buried alongside the remains of her former husband in the mausoleum of Oak Park. The final journey of the last Bruen of the great estate had gone unnoticed by the people of a town and county where this wealthy dynasty had been dominant landlords and politicians for almost two centuries.

### **Oak Park Estate**

Originally, Oak Park Estate consisted of about 1,600 acres (647ha.) enclosed within a 2.5m-high perimeter wall which had a total of four entrances. The main entrance was via the Grand Arch, which was built in the 1830s. All gates were kept permanently locked and admission was strictly regulated. The estate was made up of approximately 250 acres (101ha.) of woodland (mainly oak), 100 acres (40ha.) of parkland, with a 40-acre (16ha.) artificial lake. It also boasted an enclosed deer park and a point-to-point racecourse.

In 1922, the Carlow Golf Club relocated to Oak Park and has remained there ever since. After Henry Bruen V died, the estate was purchased by Browne's Hill Estates but was subsequently sold to the Land Commission in 1960. Carlow Golf Club, which had been rented from the Bruen Estate for many years, was also purchased from the Land Commission at that time. Carlow Rugby Club was also accommodated for within the demesne.

### **Oak Park House**

A house had stood on the site of the present house for many years before the Bruen family established themselves at Oak Park. The proof of this can be found by the presence of an inscription on a headstone in the old burial ground in Oak Park referring to a John Smith "bricklayer at New House at Painstown" who died in 1781.

The core of the present house was built in the 1830s. Records show that Henry Bruen II commissioned William V. Morrison to design a villa at Oak Park at about this time. The Morrisons (father and son) were well-known designers of stately homes and were probably introduced to Bruen by his in-laws, the Kavanagh's of Borris.



Figure 9: A tinted photograph of Oak Park House, c. 1890

The original house on the site was only about half the size of the one which presently dominates the landscape. The Bruen family were very proud of the fact that every successive generation substantially improved the mansion. The first major improvement was in 1887 when the architects McGurdy and Mitchell added the two wings. In 1902, during Henry III's reign, the house was severely damaged by fire. In the reconstruction that followed, many improvements were incorporated into the project. One huge alteration was the replacing of the main staircase from the left-hand side of the entrance hall to the right. Much of the character of the rooms was lost when all of the period furniture and fittings were removed after the 1957 auction. Many of these rooms have ornate ceilings, floors and walls, which have been well preserved and restored where necessary. Unfortunately, some of the most valuable marble fireplaces were also removed after the sale of the property. The ground floor rooms are now used as offices, conference rooms, libraries, etc. and the upstairs rooms have been converted into more offices and laboratories. The original basement was extremely dark and in bad condition. However, it has been refurbished and now contains laboratories, offices and a canteen. Although the interior of the house has been altered dramatically, the exterior of the Oak Park House is the same today as it was when it was occupied by the Bruens. Oak Park House is now a listed building, meaning that the original features of the building must be preserved and cannot be altered.

## The Grand Arch



Figure 10: The Grand Arch at Oak Park

The Grand Arch is located in on the perimeter wall on the main entrance road to the estate. Similarly to the house, it too was designed by Morrison and constructed in the mid-1830s. It is the best example in existence of a Morrison-designed Grand Entrance. It contains living accommodation for a gatekeeper and was occupied up to approximately 1970. The Grand Arch is also a listed building. Interestingly, Teagasc own the arch, but not the ground underneath it. This was because it was bought with the intention of moving it to the entrance of the Teagasc complex.

## Mausoleum

The Mausoleum is a large structure located in the woods, approximately 500 metres north-west of Oak Park House. It was designed in 1841 by the architect John B. Keane in the style of a Greek Peripteral Temple. Keane was initially a draughtsman with the Morrisons and probably got the commission because of this. The exact purpose for its construction is unknown but it is possible that Henry Bruen II commissioned it as a memento of his victory over Daniel O' Connell Jnr. In the Westminster election of 1841. The Temple was never completed and it was later used as a Mausoleum. The last two Henry Bruens and their wives are buried in the Mausoleum.

## Graveyard and Church

The Graveyard and Church are located in the Farmyard about 400 metres south of Oak Park House. The origin of the small ruined Church is uncertain. It is most likely that some stage it was used as a private Chapel for early Coke (or Cooke) landlords who were Catholic. An engraved stone slab with the date 1670 was found during a clean-up but according to some experts there are indications that part of the ruins date to an earlier period. Two table-tombs within the ruins contain the remains of some of the Coke who owned Oak Park.

## The Ice House

The Ice House is located just north of Oak Park House. It appears as a raised mound covered with tall beech trees. It consists of a brick-lined, egg-shaped chamber, about 6 metres deeps and 4 metres in diameter at its widest point. It was constructed around the year 1810 and its function was to store ice that was collected from the



lake during the winter. Because the chamber is subterranean and well-insulated, the last of the hard-packed ice did not finally melt until the middle of the following summer. Before the era of refrigeration, it was the only method by which it would be possible to preserve perishable foods for any length of time. Meat or other perishables were lowered onto the ice from the entrance using a pulley system. Icehouses were an integral part of most large estates from the late 1700s.



Figure 11: The Ice House played an integral part to food life in Oak Park.

### The Metal Bridge

The cast-iron bridge is situated to the east of Oak Park House and spans the narrowest part of the lake. It was designed by George Papworth and was built in 1819. Papworth was renowned for his bridge designs and many examples of his work can be seen in Dublin, such as the Heuston Bridge. He also designed a number of prominent buildings in the city around the same time (e.g. Balbriggan Railway Station). The main entrance to Oak Park for most of the 19th and 20th centuries was via the East Gate and across this bridge.



Figure 12: The iron bridge acted as the main entrance of the estate for nearly 200 years.

### The Dairy

The Dairy is located in close proximity to the Farmyard. It is built of granite ashlar. It has a two-storey centrepiece with an octagonal turret and single-storey wings. The building is of the same period as Oak Park House and has many, but not all, of the features of a Morrison design. Its original use is unknown but in the more recent Bruen period it was used as a dairy for butter making and milk processing.

### The Stables and Coach House

The Stables are located just west of Oak Park House. They pre-date most of the other buildings on the estate, having been built around 1800. The Stables were contained within a two-storey, U-shaped building. One wing housed the Stables for the horses while the centre-section and the second wing accommodated carriages, coaches and other accessories. There was also a residence at the rear, which was probably occupied by the Head Groom. All the other grooms and horsemen were housed within the second storey of the building. A gas-producing plant was installed in the building around 1900, which supplied gas for lighting in Oak Park House.

# Potential for Development

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As part of our research, we interviewed Tom Kirley, Director of Administration at Oak Park, and Connie Conway, Administrative Officer at Oak Park. During this interview, they outlined the feasibility of the house to be restored to its former state and open it as a “living museum”. This aspect would significantly contribute to the tourism value of the Oak Park demesne as an attraction.

There are several aspects to the Oak Park demesne and surrounding area that could be successfully developed into tourist attractions.

## Oak Park House

The present house at Oak Park, which was designed by William V. Morrison in the mid-1830s and subsequently extended in 1887, stands as one of the finest examples of Georgian architecture South-East of Ireland. It has been well preserved over the years, with Teagasc investing over €500,000 in refurbishment projects over the past two years. Many of the original features of the house have been preserved, such as mantelpieces, cornices, ceiling roses and marble floors. These have been carefully restored by master craftsmen, returning them to their former glory.

Most of the rooms in the house also remain intact. Very little of the original structural architecture (i.e. the placement of walls, doorways, etc) has been altered since Teagasc acquired the house in the 1960s, with renovations constantly taking place on the structural integrity of the building.

The exquisite exterior of the building has also been wonderfully preserved, the granite façade having been sandblasted and repointed in recent years to display to full majesty of the house’s architectural detail.

If Teagasc were to be provided with new premises for offices, and adequate security measures introduced around the surrounding fields, the house could be restored as a “living museum”, which would allow tourists and locals to see what it was like to live in the 1700 and 1800s. This type of historical tourist attraction often proves popular with tourists to Ireland, and would attract large numbers to the area.





Figure 13: The front façade of Oak Park house

### The Coach House

The coach house and stables that lies just beyond the house are currently derelict and in a state of disrepair. However, it was suggested by Mr. Kirley and Ms. Conway that there is a possibility of them being developed into an education/visitors' centre, provided there is adequate controls put over visitor movement around the area. The sizable buildings, which date back to about 1800, could house an interactive history of Teagasc's research while at Oak Park, as well as a commercial retail unit for tourists. The grooms' residences and the gas producing plant could also be restored, showing tourists the difference between ordinary and servant life while the estate was functioning. The building could also act as a meeting point for tour groups. There is also ample space around the buildings to create car and coach parking facilities.



Figure 14: The Coach House and Stables

### The Farmyard and Dairy

Unfortunately, like the coach house and stables, the farmyard and dairy have fallen into a state of disrepair. However, they could also be restored, and add to the “living museum” experience.

### Mausoleum

The mausoleum, which houses the Bruen family, is situated about 500m north-west of the house. It was originally designed in 1841 as a temple by John B. Keane for Henry II, to celebrate Henry’s defeat over Daniel O’Connell Jr. in the 1841 Westminster elections. It was built in a Greek order of design, but was never completed. The mausoleum now holds the remains of the last two Henry Bruens and their wives.



Clockwise from top left: exterior of mausoleum, interior of mausoleum, grave of Henry Bruen V (d.1954), detail of wall section.

## The Forest Walk

The Oak Park Forest Walk consists of 125 acres (51ha.) of mature woodland, as well as a 3-acre recreational area with picnic facilities and greens. The forest contains a wide variety of trees, plants and wildlife that are unique to the South-East of Ireland and could be developed into a major nature-tourism attraction in conjunction with the lake and surround area. We will take a deeper look at the forest walk in the next section.





Typical tranquil scenes at Oak Park Forest Walk.



### The Lake

The 40-acre (16ha.) manmade lake, which is situated in front of the house, has the possibility to become a major attraction for angling tourism. However, in order for this to occur, according to Mr. Kirley and Ms. Conway, the lake would have to be dredged, deepened and aerated to allow fish stocks to survive. If this were to occur, jetties could be built of the council's side of the lake (i.e. that of the forest walk, at the recreational area) and could be marketed as a nature-tourism attraction.



Above: The Lake at Oak Park.

## Surrounding Area

Carlow is a very scenic county, with many rivers, hills and valleys. These geographical features could be marketed in conjunction with Oak Park's lake and forest walk as a nature-tourism area. Many rivers in the area, such as the Barrow, the Burrin, the Slaney and the Lerr, are known throughout Irish and British angling communities as excellent sources of freshwater fish, such as trout, salmon, bream and pike. However this amenity is not marketed to its full potential at the moment, and could prove to be incredibly popular with international anglers.

The Barrow could also be marketed as a boating river, with its deep, wide channels flowing from the Slieve Bloom Mountains in Offaly to the Suir Estuary in Co. Waterford. Before the advent of railways, it was an important means of commercial transportation, with connections with the Grand Canal<sup>6</sup> in Athy, Co. Kildare. In the recent past, boating was conducted on the lower half of the river at Graiguenamanagh, Co. Kilkenny. Unfortunately, this died out due to lack of demand. However, in recent years, there has been a revival of boating along the river. This, combined with fishing opportunities, could be marketed at numerous demographics, including families and fishing groups.

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<sup>6</sup> The Grand Canal was one of two major waterways leading out of Dublin city. The Grand Canal connects Dublin, in the east of the country, to the River Shannon, in the west of the country.



# The Forest Park Walk

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Carlow County Council and Carlow Town Council combined to develop the Oak Park Forest Walk as a recreational and community amenity on approximately 127 acres of land, which Teagasc offered for lease, for the benefit of the people of Carlow and its environs, in an outstanding act of public generosity. The Forest Walk was officially opened for public use on Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2006. It cost in excess of €400,000 to develop and complete successfully. It is open daily from 8am until 9pm. Current statistics indicate that up to 9,000 people visit the park each week.

The project was centred on the development of the forest to provide the general public with a natural woodland experience. It also improves the environment, as well as providing a habitat for the wildlife that resides in the area.

## Layout

The Woodland Walks extend over a significant distance of 4 kilometres which include a number of intriguing trails, such as Butlers Wood Loop (700m), Lake Path (800m), Fox Covert Track (1,100m) and Sally Island Trail (1,700m). Each of these walkways are of varying lengths and are colour-coded for the benefit of their users. The fulcrum of these paths is the beautiful, picturesque seated picnic area which overlooks the majestic lake. It is an open and child-friendly grassy area. It is also planned to introduce other trails in the future.



Figure 15: Map of Oak Park Forest Walk with the walking route marked.

One of the features of the Forest Walk that is commented on by many visitors is the quality of the walkways. The underfoot conditions are consistent throughout the



Figure 16: Example of the walkways.

entire four-kilometre walk. The paths are composed of a succession of wooden sleepers. The gaps between the sleepers are filled with tree bark, resin and soil, which makes the park and its breath-taking scenery accessible to all of the community. Its capability of comfortably facilitating wheelchair users and the disabled has resulted in it being quoted as being an excellent example of how it is possible to design and develop amenities that are universally accessible and being continually reported to the Irish National Disability Authority. However, despite receiving praise and appreciation, this technique it is not flawless. The pathways can be hazardous

when wet. They become slippery, and ultimately dangerous, to the unaware. However, Carlow Local Authorities combated this misdemeanour directly by purchasing a machine

which sweeps leaves off the paths, as well as placing sand on them. This, in turn, absorbs any precipitation that may come into contact with the sleepers.

The park was developed with the intention of it becoming a tourist attraction. Because of this, adequate facilities were installed. The current car park of the Forest Walk has an accommodation capacity for 100 cars and boasts an excellently presented public toilet block of substantial size.

## Flora

Oak Park Forest Walk is a paradise for thousands of species of trees, plants, shrubs and bushes. Its exquisite quality of soil, peaceful setting and lowland position makes it an ideal haven and habitat for an extensive variety of plant life.



Figure 17: Pedunculate Oak

The Forest Walk is composed of a mature and mixed selection of woodland. Oak is a minority species here but the name Oak Park suggests that it was once more prominent. The species most common in the Forest Walk today is pedunculate oak, usually associated with richer low-lying woods, while sessile oak is associated with upland areas where soils are not as nutrient rich. The pedunculate oak is recognisable from the sessile oak, because of its pedunculate acorns (with stems) and its leaves have very short stalks.

Along with the pedunculate oak, the Forest Walk has an abundance of other tree species. One of these is Beech. Beech is native to temperate Europe and North America. It grows on a wide range of soil types, acidic or basic, provided they are not waterlogged. The tree canopy casts dense shade, and carpets the ground with dense leaf litter. Because of this, the ground flora beneath such trees may be sparse. The leaves of beech trees are entire or sparsely toothed; its bark is smooth and light grey. Another variety of note is Ash. Ash trees in the park range in height from approximately 8m-12m. Although some varieties of Ash (mainly sub-tropical) are evergreen in nature, the ones in the Forest Walk are deciduous. The Ash tree's broadleaved relative, the Sycamore species, can also be found in abundance throughout the Park. These species underwent significant regeneration, in comparison to other types, during the early development of the Forest Walk.

Two species that did not require any human interference were the Scots Pine and Larch groups. Both of these species are among the biggest contributors to the population of plant life in the park.



There are many other species of trees and other plants within the park, but to publish a comprehensive list of these would take many pages.

The forest is also home to many fungi, mosses and ferns. Due to its heavy, dense canopy, the forest is a warm, damp environment, which helps these species to flourish. Ivy is also very prevalent in the forest, due to the low light conditions on the forest floor because of the canopy. Ivy plays an integral part in regulating the forest's growth.

## Fauna

The sheer variety of plant life within the Oak Park Forest Walk easily encourages and nourishes the growth of the wildlife throughout the park and even beyond its boundaries. From the animal kingdom's perspective, the surrounding countryside benefits enormously from having such a providing facility in its vicinity.

The Forest Walk is not only appealing to tourists and nature lovers, but also to a very wide range of botanists, ecologists and agricultural enthusiasts. As well as these groups, the subject of ornithology has become increasingly popular year after year since the opening of the Forest Walk. Similarly to the flora, the amount of bird species that could be listed is simply too vast to even attempt. Instead, here are a few

of the more commonly found birds amongst the trees of Oak Park Forest Walk.



Figure 18: The Greenfinch

Due to its communal characteristics, the Greenfinch group is certainly one of the more preponderant species of bird that can be observed in the park. The Greenfinch is of the *Passeriformes* order. It is widespread throughout Europe, North Africa and South-west Asia. It normally resides solely in its

country of origin, but some northern populations migrate further south during the winter. Woodland edges, farmland hedges and gardens with thick vegetation are favoured for breeding, hence its attraction to Oak Park.



Figure 19: The Pied Wagtail

During late autumn, there is also an abundance of pigeons, pheasants, rooks, jackdaws, robins and starlings within the forest's canopy. There have also been sightings of jays and buzzards.

The Yellowhammer is another of the common species in the park. It too is a passerine bird, which breeds across Europe and much of Asia. Although it is common in the Forest Walk, it is in serious decline across Europe. (In the UK the species fell by 54% between 1970 and 2003.)

Fortunately, the final species of bird in our list, the Pied Wagtail, is not experiencing such a worrying time. Out of these three types of birds, the Pied Wagtail is the least populated in the park. This species breeds in much of Europe and Asia and parts of North Africa. It resides in the milder parts of Europe, but migrates to Africa in the winter. It is an insectivorous bird of open country, often near habitation and water, meaning that the Forest Walk is an idyllic location for it to nest as it fulfils each of the species needs. For instance, the park's lake provides substantial water resources for the Wagtail. Given its insectivorous nature, the supply of food must too be suitable to the bird's necessities. This fact is largely helped by the ever-growing presence of mosquitoes within the confines of the park.

Presently, there are approximately 20 varieties of mosquitoes to be found in Ireland, inhabiting areas where stagnant water is prevalent. Of these 20 types, at least six are estimated to inhabit the park. None of these species carry malaria. However, to combat the problem of visitors receiving mosquito bites the Local Authorities have plans to install mosquito repellent dispensers at various stations around the park. The County and Town Councils are aware that these mosquitoes are of huge significance in the park, as they are a primary food source for birds and to the several different species of bat present in the park.

Of the ten species of bats living in Ireland, seven inhabit the park. Therefore, any chemical or artificial intervention into the bats' food source would have a detrimental effect on this protected animal that exist in the woodland area alongside wild Irish hares.

Outside the woodland region however, the wildlife is not so abundant. At the present time, there are no fish species existing in the lake, leaving only the swans, ducks, moorhens and waterhens to inhabit the waters. The islands that are dispersed throughout the lake offer convenient shelter to many wild and game birds. Several species of dragonfly can also be found around the lake area.

## **Recreational Amenities & Activities**

At present, the Forest Walk's recreational facilities are solely based around relaxation and observation. The park is open during the day to anyone wishing to take in all of the luscious scenery and calming atmosphere, which the park has made its most prized characteristic.



Figure 20: The recreational area at the Forest Walk

However, both the County and Town Councils have been analysing potential opportunities to expand its already outstanding service to the community and it seems that there are several niches in the market that could, with some careful planning and consideration, be exploited.

One of the main objectives has to be to fulfil the potential that accompanies the presence of the lake. Although the artificial lake

still belongs to Teagasc, the entry of fish stocks into the lake would not only be of vast benefit to the people of Carlow and possibly future tourists, but also to Teagasc itself. Should the presence of fish in the lake become reality, it would go a long way to cleansing, dredging and aerating the water and therefore require less maintenance and minding. From a tourism point of view, this opportunity is too good to miss. Assisted by its title “the largest still-water lake in Ireland” fishing and angling enthusiasts, and indeed ichthyologists, would be very attracted to the prospect of

accessible fresh-water fishing in the largest lake of its kind in the country. The installation of jetties/platforms on the councils’ side (i.e. Forest Walk side) would not pose many problems.

If such a project were undertaken, it would open up a wealth of options to the council’s. Angling competitions could be integrated as part of its service to the community. In recent weeks, Teagasc has removed most of the reeds present along the banks of the lake. This increases surface area of the lake, allowing more oxygen to be absorbed.

In addition, many schools, community groups (including organisations working with people with disabilities) and other agencies, such as the National Parks and

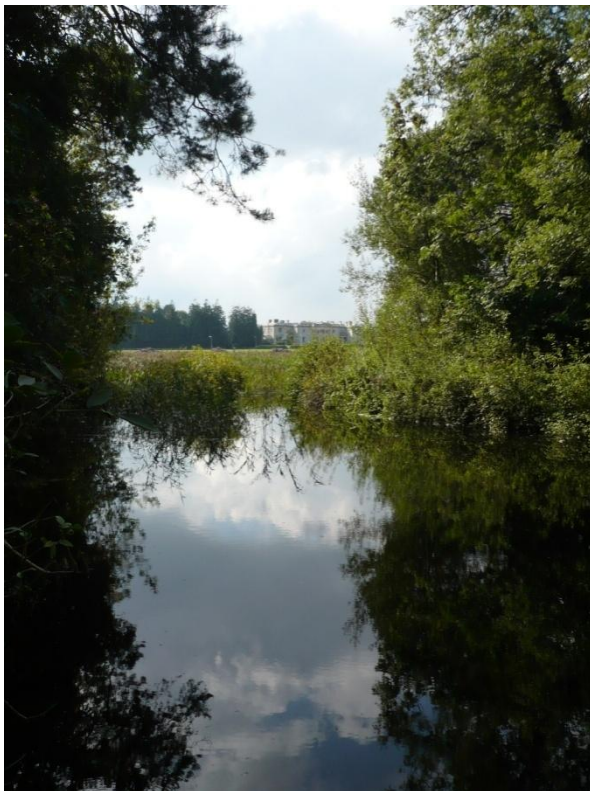


Figure 21: View of the lake at Oak Park, with the house in the background.



Wildlife Service, receive guided walks of the Forest Walk. However, this could be expanded to establish horse trails within the woodland. With this, "Toll Riding" could be incorporated. The concept of "Toll Riding" is that by becoming members of the horse trail, riders and their horses gain access to the trail and insurance cover, and they contribute to the cost of trail maintenance. There is a fluorescent membership band which members put on their helmet to identify themselves to the ranger to prevent non-members using the trail. This recreational activity has been successfully implemented at Grey Abbey Estate in County Down, Northern Ireland.

Another idea on how to optimise the public usage and benefit gained from the Forest Walk is by appealing to families. Communal get-togethers such as "Family Fun Days" could be considered in order to get the surrounding community more involved with the development and usage of the services the Forest Walk offers to them. Such events could be run at monthly, or even annual, intervals. A host of workshop-based activities for children and their parents such as juggling, face-painting, acrobats, puppet shows, drama, stilt walking, story-telling, tree dressing, music, soccer and treasure hunts would be of great attraction to the target market in question. "Family Fun Days" of this kind have reaped wonderful success at similar parks including Donadea Forest Park in County Kildare.

# Surrounding Development

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## Residential

Residentially, the regions within close proximity to Oak Park are composed of a combination of low and medium-density housing. To the south and south-east of the demesne medium-density housing is particularly dominant with the presence of small estates and neighbourhoods occupying the landscape.

Along the eastern boundary of the park the case is different. The area is a long-established middle-class area, with many doctors and lawyers living there. Housing of very low density can be found here and further north, but beyond that, residential development is limited.

## Transport

The transportation facilities surrounding the Oak Park estate are already of a high standard. However, as demonstrated by the Carlow Town Environs Local Area Plan 2008, these facilities will be of even higher quality in the near future.

The proposed development of a major link road, which will extend from the eastern boundary of the estate (the main Carlow-Dublin road) to the western boundary (the Carlow-Athy road). This road will make access to the area more convenient for visitors whilst simultaneously benefiting local road users by preventing congestion the primary ring road surrounding the town.

In theory, this development should improve accessibility to the Oak Park Forest Walk tenfold as it will work in conjunction with the newly established and completed M9 motorway, also known as the Carlow Bypass, which was opened on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2008. This excellent feat of engineering stretches for a total mainline distance of 18.5 kilometres from just south of the village of Castledermot, Co. Kildare (approx. 9km north-east of Carlow town) as far as Powerstown, Co. Carlow (approx. 6km south of Carlow town). The motorway has several junctions along its route, which only enhances the ease with which potential tourists will be able to gain access to the amenity. At Powerstown, it connects with the main Carlow-Kilkenny road while at Rathcrogue, Co. Carlow, the motorway meets with the primary Carlow-Wexford road (the main thoroughfare on which ferry tourists enter the country). From both of these destinations, the bypass can be taken to its northern terminal at Castledermot, eliminating the task of getting through the usually over-congested town of Carlow. Access to the proposed Oak Park link road could then be gained at its junction with the main Carlow-Dublin road. To this effect, the Oak Park Forest Walk would be easily accessible to visitors from the more southerly counties and, more importantly, the capital.

The connection that will exist between the Athy road and the proposed link road, will also help people coming to the county from the north, and should help them get to the park easily. This fact is aided further by the presence of the principal Carlow-Laois road on the Carlow ring road.

In addition to the excellent road access, both in place and planned for the future, the presence of the train station in the south of Carlow town adds another dimension to Carlow's capacity and potential to transform the Oak Park Forest Walk into a tourist destination recognised countrywide and internationally.

Oak Park Forest Walk has benefited, and will benefit extensively in the future, as a result of the responsible development of transportation facilities in the Carlow region.

## **Recreational**

### **Carlow Golf Club**

Carlow Golf Club is a 27-hole (18+9) parkland course laid out in the former wild deer park attached to the old Bruen estate at Oak Park (Painstown). The original club was founded on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1899. The initial name of the club was Leinster Golf Club, and consisted of a 9-hole course at Gotham, which was designed to serve the Carlow/Athy (south Co. Kildare) area.

In 1902, the name was changed to Carlow Golf Club and it was affiliated to the Golfing Union of Ireland. After the First World War, membership grew to unprecedented proportions, which resulted in the transfer of the club to the 164-acre portion of the Deerpark part of the Bruen estate in 1922.

The new course designer Cecil Barcroft laid out an excellent 18 holes over the superb wooded and undulating site. In 1937, the legendary Scottish architect, Tom Simpson, assisted by Molly Gourlay, was commissioned to redesign some ten greens and most of the bunkers. It is a great example of these great designers of the past, and the basic course remains unchanged to this day.

### **Carlow Football Club**

In spite of what its name may suggest, County Carlow Football Club is a rugby union club. The club was founded in the area to the south of the Oak Park estate in October 1873 and is one of the oldest rugby clubs in Ireland. As was the norm in the days preceding the development and prosperity of Gaelic football and soccer and prior to the foundation of the Rugby Football Union (RFU), the earlier clubs were known simply as Football Clubs with no mention of rugby in the title.

The club was established at a meeting in the Club House Hotel, Carlow in October 1873. The founder, Colonel Horace Rochfort of Clogrennane, Co. Carlow, was

elected the club's first President. The club colours were registered as black and amber. In 1968, the club moved to its current home at Oak Park.

County Carlow Football Club has a very proud history. Probably its most distinguished and celebrated period came when it enjoyed five years in Division 1, the pinnacle of Irish club rugby from 2001 to 2006. During this period, the County Carlow senior squad boasted one of the best players in world rugby. The captain and fly-half of the Argentina national squad and the 2007 Rugby Writers of Ireland Player of the Year, Felipe Contepomi.

### Other Development

To the south-west of the Oak Park estate, there lies the now-derelict area where the majestic sugar beet factory of Carlow once stood. On Friday, 11 March 2005 the loss of 190 full-time jobs and a further 130 seasonal jobs marked the end of an era which the people of the county had been anticipating since the announcement of the factory's closure was confirmed in January of the same year.

At the time, there was shock throughout the town at the loss of the jobs and also the loss of one the county's most iconic and treasured resources. After the announcement of closure, about 4,000 people demonstrated in Carlow town against the decision but unfortunately, were not listened to.

However, the loss of the factory may ultimately be of unprecedented benefit, not only the county, but to the region as a whole. This is because of the size and potential of the now-vacant site, which is located on the Carlow-Athy road, where it will join with the proposed Oak Park link road.

A proposal has been made to redevelop on the site where the sugar beet factory once functioned and to transform it into a state-of-the-art facility by Greencore (former owners of the sugar factory). The regeneration project features a range of mixed developments including 3,000 homes, retail facilities, a 50-acre business park dubbed "Carlow Enterprise Zone" and a 35-acre riverside walkway and park on both sides of the River Barrow.

It is believed that the project, which will become known as the "Carlow Gateway Commercial Centre" if it comes into being, will have the potential to employ 1,400 people in the office, retail and other commercial aspects of the scheme. A further 400 highly qualified people will be employed within the proposed business park working in the sector of research-based food and ingredient enterprises which will position Carlow as the national centre for these enterprises. Finally, another 200 are hoped to be employed in the sectors of education, leisure and culture. This brings the total of the new potential employment opportunities that will be created in Carlow town to 2,000.

The Gateway will involve an investment of €1.1bn in the county and will ultimately create an integrated living and working community of 8,000 people. If it goes to plan, it will present an opportunity to meet the development needs of the town in a single, integrated, fully serviced site on the edge of the town.

# Other Tourist Attractions in Carlow

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Apart from Oak Park, Carlow has numerous attractions that attract over 60,000 foreign tourists every year. These range from 13<sup>th</sup> Century castles to portal dolmens to ancient churches. There are also numerous nature-oriented attractions, such as the Barrow Walk, fishing on the River Burrin and Altamont Gardens. It is unlikely that one would not be able to find something to suit everyone's taste in this magnificent, magical county.

## Altamont Gardens



Figure 22: Altamont Manor, Carlow

Altamont Gardens, originally an Ascendancy<sup>7</sup> estate, boasts one of the finest collection of both native and non-native plants in the South-East. Originally owned by the Lecky family, it is now controlled by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The gardens directly surrounding the house overlook a picturesque, manmade lake and are mainly of early 19<sup>th</sup> century design. Beyond this is a more wild “smell garden”, with various scented European and Asian plants that are a pleasure to your olfactory faculties.

## The Barrow Walk

The Barrow Walk is one of the most popular nature walks in the whole of Ireland. The River Barrow, stretching 190km from the Slieve Bloom Mountains in Co. Laois right down to the Suir Estuary in Co. Waterford, has long been a favourite for inland cruising, as well as bird-watching and fishing. The Barrow Walk, stretching 112km from Lowtown in Co. Kildare to St. Mullins in South Co. Carlow, provides a traffic-free towpath for people to walk along the river. Time has left numerous manmade objects along the river, including bridges, grain mills, castles and small town and village settlements.

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<sup>7</sup> “The Ascendancy” was the name given to the Protestant English upper classes that came to Ireland in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and established vast estates all around the country.



## Brownhill Dolmen



Figure 23: Brownhill Dolmen

The mysteriousness and majesty of the Brownhill Dolmen has captured the imaginations of locals and visitors for centuries. Located 3km east of Carlow Town, this magnificent portal dolmen (a type of megalithic tomb) is believed to have the largest dolmen capstone in Europe, weighing an estimated 105 tonnes. It was probably built between 2900BC and 3500BC and is thought to have been the site of religious rites and rituals. Others suggests that it might have been a border marker.

## Duckett's Grove



Figure 24: The remains of Duckett's Grove castle

Situated about 7km outside of Carlow Town, Duckett's Grove Castle has a long and turbulent history. In recent years, the grounds surrounding the abandoned house have been landscaped to the original garden and pleasure grounds' blueprints. There are plans to restore the house to its former glory, with its pastiche of architectural styles of Georgian, Victorian, Italianate and Gothic revival. This Ascendancy house was the subject of Ireland's winning entry to the Aldo Papone Award last year.

## Carlow Cathedral



Carlow Cathedral is a magnificent example of the work of architect, Thomas A. Cobden. It was commissioned by Bishop James Doyle and was completed in 1833, at a cost of £9,000. The cathedral tower dominates the surrounding townscape and is an exact replica of the Belfroi Tower in Bruges, Belgium. There has been extensive renovation to the cathedral in recent years and it remains Carlow's main place of worship.

Figure 25: The Cathedral of the Assumption, Carlow; © Carlow County Museum

## Carlow Castle



Figure 26: Carlow Castle; © Carlow County Museum

Carlow Castle is situated in the centre of Carlow town. It is believed to date from 1207 and to have been built by William de Marshall, Earl of Pembroke. Sadly, today, only the west wall and towers remain. This is mainly due to an attempt, in 1814, to remodel the castle for use as an insane asylum. A local physician, who was in charge of the project, decided to use dynamite to expedite the renovation. All he succeeded in doing was to destroy the castle. Miraculously, no lives were lost in the explosion!

## Éigse Arts Festival

Éigse (meaning 'gathering of artists', pronounced 'egg-shuh') is an internationally renowned Arts Festival held annually in Carlow at the beginning of June. The festival features visual arts exhibitions, theatre, comedy, dance, literary events, music, crafts and street entertainment. It attracts artists, musicians and performers from a variety of countries, as well as being a showcase for local talent.

# Amenities in the Carlow Area

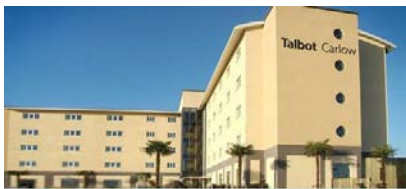
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There are many and varied amenities available within a short distance of Oak Park Estate, which will help to make your stay in Carlow a pleasant and memorable experience.

These include hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and pubs. Amenities also include golf courses, horse riding, public gardens, bowling and a wide range of shops.



**Seven Oaks Hotel**, situated within walking distance of Carlow town centre, has a warm and friendly atmosphere. It has 90 individually designed bedrooms including family rooms and executive suites. Its restaurant is renowned for its good food and it also boasts a health and leisure centre which caters for all ages.



**Talbot Hotel**, which is two kilometres from the town centre, offers 84 luxury guestrooms. It has an excellent restaurant for evening dining and also provides delicious food all day in Corries Bar and Bistro. It, too, has a fully equipped leisure centre.

**Mount Wolseley Hotel & Country Club**, situated approximately 18 kilometres from Carlow town is well worth a visit. As well as a luxury hotel and leisure centre, Mount Wolseley boasts an 18 hole Championship golf course. It is also of historical interest, as it is the ancestral home of Frederick Wolseley, who gave his name to the Wolseley motor car.



**Dinn Rí Hotel**, is situated in the heart of Carlow town and is particularly popular, at night, with young people as they regularly feature rock and pop bands. It provides excellent food both in the hotel itself and in its adjacent bistro, Brooks, which has a very friendly atmosphere and is always full, at any time of day.

Carlow also offers a wide selection of restaurants featuring Irish, Italian, Chinese, Thai and Indian cuisine.

The town features numerous pubs, which are popular with locals and visitors alike. Several of these provide music, especially at weekends. However, for traditional

Irish music, the best known is **Teach Dolmain**, which has regular weekly sessions. In true traditional style, if you have an instrument with you, you are invited to join in!

There are numerous, Fáilte Ireland approved, guesthouses in Carlow, which offer bed and breakfast (B&B) at very affordable rates. It enables you to meet an Irish family, who very often, have a wealth of local knowledge about sites of interest and other amenities. If you prefer a more intimate atmosphere and personal attention, then this type of accommodation is for you! A list of approved guesthouses can be obtained from the Tourist Office in Carlow town.



# Conclusion

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It can be seen from this booklet that this project has been quite time-consuming. The amount of work which went into its completion may have seemed daunting to some. However, we enjoyed the challenge.



Figure 27: The formal gardens at Oak Park, c. 1950

Under the guidance of our Transition Year Co-ordinator, Mr. Jarlath Bolger, we compiled the relevant data needed for the project. We learned of Oak Park's rich and turbulent history through interviews with local historians. It is a significant part of Carlow's history, and we feel that it is

important that this story be kept alive through the maintenance and

development of Oak Park and its environs. There is enormous potential for further development of the house and grounds, with the possibility of it being turned into a 'living museum'. The examples of masonry and plasterwork within the house demonstrate the incredible skills of the craftsmen of the past. Sadly, these skills now seem to be disappearing, and so, we feel it is important to preserve the vestiges of a bygone era.

The Forest Walk is also a significant contributor to 'responsible tourism development'. It is a rich eco-system comprising of hundreds of different flora and fauna. The establishment of the park by the Council has guaranteed the safety of the habitat in which these plants and animals live. This contributes to the enrichment of the lives of local people, as well as visitors to the area.

We are delighted to have been given this opportunity to bring Oak Park to an international audience. It is our opinion that the Forest Walk and Demesne could rival any tourist attraction in Ireland.

In conclusion, we are very proud to be associated with documenting Oak Park. In the immortal words of the Irish poet, Patrick Kavanagh, "*it is a wise man that knows his own half acre*".

# Acknowledgements

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Thanks also to our parents for all their support and contributions throughout the project.



# Glossary

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**Acre:** An imperial unit of measurement for area. One acre = 0.40469 hectares.

**Ascendancy:** The name given to the British upper classes that came to Ireland in the 1500s. They controlled most of the land in Ireland until the 1800s.

**Catholic Emancipation:** The repeal of a series of laws between 1700 and 1829 which had restricted the rights of Catholics regarding freedom of religious expression, rights to education, freedom of movement, etc.

**Conservative:** A member of the Conservative political party in Britain. See also *Westminster, MP, House of Commons, Liberal*.

**Council, Town OR County:** An administrative body which controls regulations and bye-laws within its boundaries. Usually, only large towns have town councils. Smaller communities are under the governance of County Councils.

**County:** Administrative region. Ireland is divided up into 32 counties of varying sizes (26 in the Republic, 6 in Northern Ireland).

**Cromwellian Plantation:** Estates in Ireland that were given to people from England and Scotland in return for loyal service to Oliver Cromwell, ruler of Britain from 1649-1660.

**Dublin:** The capital city of Ireland. It was once the second-most important city in the British Empire. Was originally established in 922AD by Viking settlers. Is the second-oldest city in Western Europe.

**Éigse:** (pr. *egg-shuh*) Irish word meaning “gathering of artists”.

**Fáilte Ireland:** The Irish tourism board. Renamed in recent years from “Bord Fáilte”. *Fáilte* is the Irish word for “welcome”.

**Head Groom:** The person in charge of looking after the horses of an estate.

**Home Rule:** A movement established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century which sought of an Irish parliament to be set up. This would have meant that Ireland had control over its own affairs and would not be reliant on *Westminster* for political decisions.

**House of Commons:** The lowest level of government at Westminster. MPs are elected to office by general election every five years. Prior to 1912, MPs were not paid for their service. Due to this, many came from upper class backgrounds, and

did not represent the needs of the working- or middle-classes. See also *Westminster, MP*.

**Irish National Disability Authority:** Responsible for ensuring that all public services, areas and buildings are accessible to disabled people.

**Land Commission:** Established in 1881 to buy up land (mostly from failed estates) and redistribute it amongst farmers.

**Liberal:** A member of the Liberal political party in Britain. See also *Westminster, Conservative, MP, House of Commons*.

**MP:** Abbreviation for **Member of Parliament**. The title given to members of the House of Commons, part of the British Government.

**Office of Public Works:** Also known as the OPW. Responsible for the management of sites and institutions of cultural and historical significance within the Irish Republic.

**Rector:** Title given to the person in charge of the boarding school at Knockbeg College.

**St. Mary's Knockbeg College:** Our school! A voluntary Catholic secondary school run by the diocese of Kildare-Leighlin. Website: [www.knockbegcollege.ie](http://www.knockbegcollege.ie)

**Teagasc:** The name given to the Agricultural Institute (originally established in 1958). Is responsible for the development of new crops. Is a leading light in Europe for the development of bio-fuels.

**Transition Year:** A year during secondary education between the Junior Certificate course and Leaving Certificate course in which a more relaxed, less academic approach is taken in school. Students (15-16yrs old) are encouraged to develop other non-academic skills, such as communication skills, social skills, artistic skills, sports skills, etc. They are encouraged to get involved with the wider community and become better, well-rounded citizens. This year is seen as invaluable to many students, as it allows them to pursue career paths through a number of work placements throughout the year. The Transition Year course is different in every school.

**Tory:** An informal term used to describe a Conservative party member. See also *Conservative*.

**Ullard:** An old townland on the outskirts of Carlow. The area now is no longer known as Ullard.

**Westminster:** The place in London, England where the various houses of the British government meet. Hence, the term “Westminster” used to refer to the British Government houses collectively.

# Sponsors

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We would also like to thank the following sponsors of the Aldo Papone Award. Without their support, this conference would not be able to take place.







# Teacher's Guide

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## Introduction

This project has given us the opportunity to present our insights and opinions about Oak Park demesne and forest walk. However, this is just one of many examples in Ireland of a site that has the potential to become a major tourism attraction. This project has also let us learn about other tourist attractions in different countries, i.e. the ones that were presented at the international tourism conference.

This project has also let us gain better understanding of our local history and political geography, which helped with our academic studies in history and geography.

## Aims of this Case Study

The main aims of this project were as follows:

- To thoroughly research a tourist attraction in Ireland in order to produce a definitive, coherent case study.
- To develop our understanding of environmental protection and the contribution tourism can make in this area.
- To develop our understanding of the tourism industry in Ireland.

## Methodologies

Firstly, and most obviously, this project helped us develop our research skills. This was through the obtaining of various data and organising it into a clear and concise case study to be presented at the international tourism conference in Nice.

During our research, we also developed our interview skills by interviewing numerous people about the history of Oak Park and the Forest Walk.

This project gave us a greater understanding of Irish history and political geography also, with the history of the Bruens reflecting the social and political landscape of Ireland at the time.

Finally, this project immensely developed out IT skills. The production of the booklet and PowerPoint presentation helped us to improve our word-processing and slideshow presentation skills, something that will stand to us in the future.

# Photograph Acknowledgements

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All photographs taken by Henry Roberts, except the following:

**Figure 16: Pedunculate Oak**, pg 29, © Roger Butterfield, England.

**Figure 17: The Greenfinch**, pg 30, © Dunge Valley Hidden Gardens, Cheshire, England.

**Figure 18: The Pied Wagtail**, pg 30, © Dunge Valley Hidden Gardens, Cheshire, England.

**Figure 21: Altamont Manor**, pg 38, © Carlow County Museum, Carlow, Ireland.

**Figure 22: Brownhill Dolmen**, pg 39, © Carlow County Museum, Carlow, Ireland.

**Figure 24: Cathedral of the Assumption**, pg 40, © Carlow County Museum, Carlow, Ireland.

**Figure 25: Carlow Castle**, pg 40, © Carlow County Museum, Carlow, Ireland.