

The Garden Heritage of COUNTY LAOIS



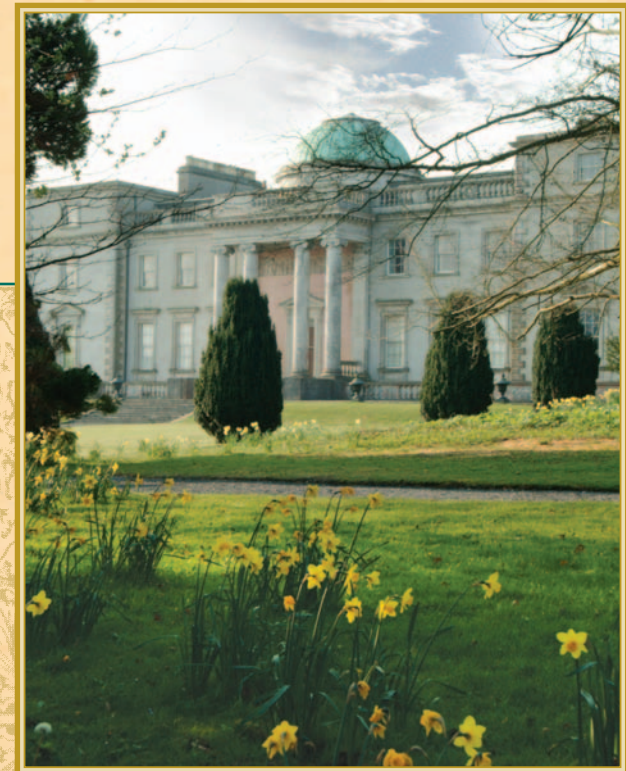
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AN ACTION OF THE LAOIS HERITAGE PLAN



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The Garden Heritage of COUNTY LAOIS

Thousands of gardeners have passed through Laois. They include Stone Age farmers, medieval monks, cottage holders, great landowners and Laois men like Noel Keenan, who transformed a cow paddock into his vision of paradise.

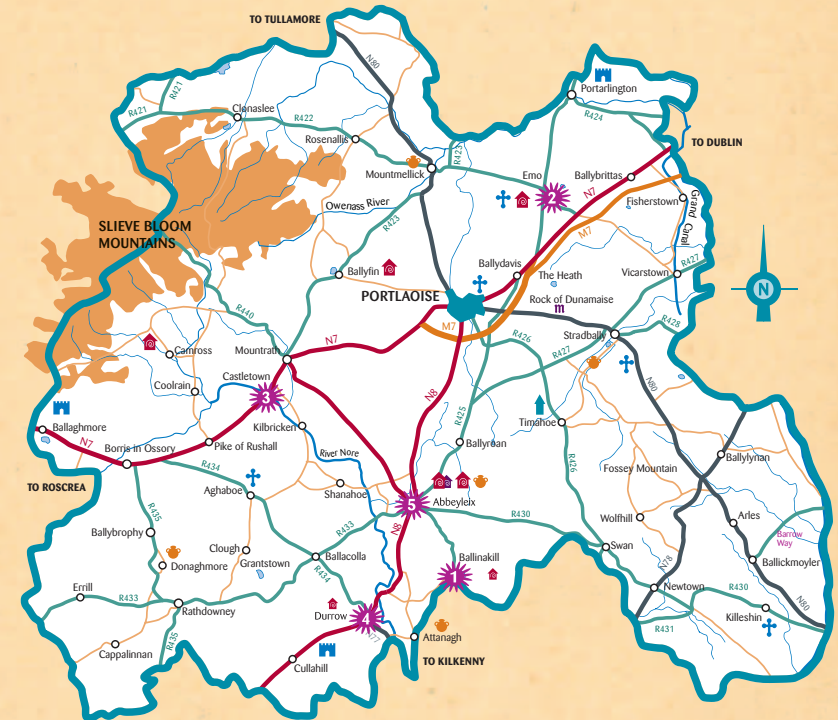
This brochure invites you to explore the gardening heritage of Laois. It includes descriptions of five gardens open to the public. The final pages mention just a few of the plants that generations of gardeners have left behind in the county's private gardens, hedgerows and on its roadsides.













Three men had a great influence on the gardens of County Laois. In the late 1800s, William Robinson worked as the garden foreman at Ballykilcavan. After a quarrel with his employer, Robinson put out the fires that heated the glasshouses and opened all the windows. Then he fled in the night. He never again worked in Ireland, but the Irish landscape and its gardens had a deep influence upon him. In England, Robinson scorned "floral rugs" and championed a more natural style of gardening. He is largely responsible for way most gardens look today.

From 1908 until the foundation of the State in 1922, avid plant collector Murray Hornibrook made his home at Knapton House near Abbeylax. He travelled from the wilds of Connemara to the walled gardens of the great houses, looking for interesting garden plants. Although Hornibrook is best known for his collection of dwarf conifers, several modern garden plants are propagated largely because he took note of them.

In recent years, the county's most influential plantsman was the late Noel Keenan. In 1984, he created a magnificent garden filled with many plants that had never before been seen in Laois. By the time of his death in 2000, Keenan's willingness to share his gardening knowledge had inspired a whole new generation of Laois gardeners.

Today the landscape of Laois reflects the legacies of these three men and of countless unnamed gardeners.



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|  Historic Site |  Heywood Gardens |
|  Church / Abbey / Monastic Site |  Emo Court |
|  Round Tower |  Gash Gardens |
|  Castle |  Castle Durrrow Hotel |
|  Museum |  Abbey Sense Garden |
|  Heritage Town | |
|  Heritage Building | |

HEYWOOD GARDENS

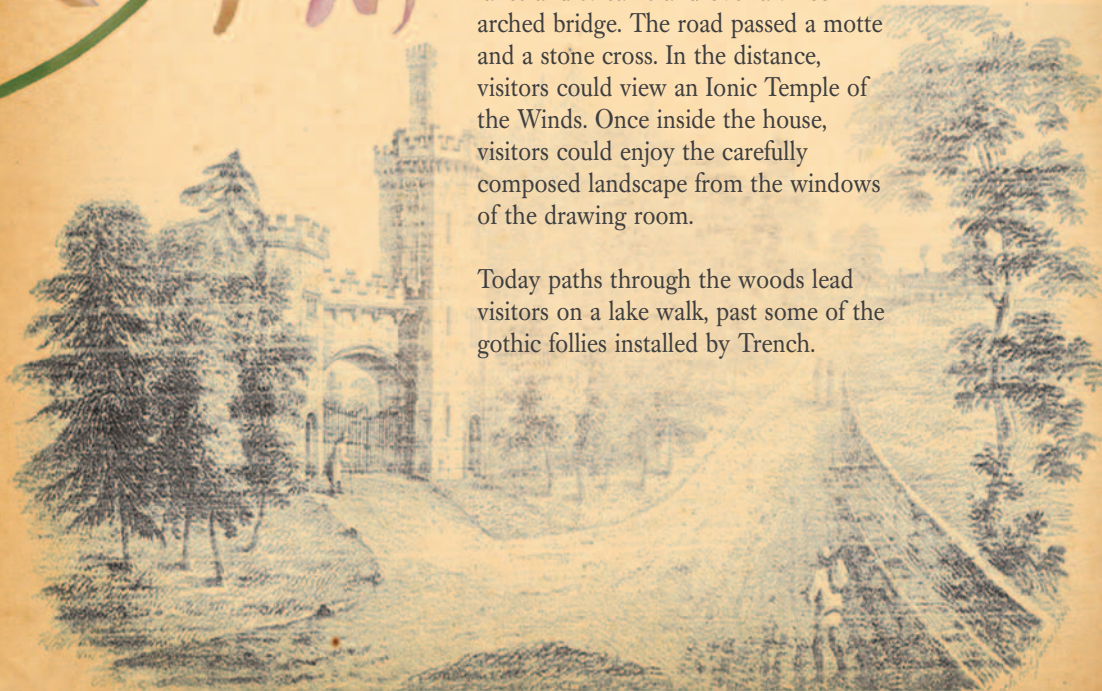


At Heywood Gardens, an 18th century parkland surrounds smaller, formal gardens created by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll in first part of the 20th century.

After building Heywood House in 1773, architect Frederick Trench turned to the landscape between his home and the village of Ballinakill. Inspired by his Grand Tour of Continental Europe, Trench moved hills, dug lakes, planted trees and placed follies. The parkland he created was considered the most exquisite romantic landscape of its time.

Visitors entered the huge gothic gateway that still stands on the Dublin Road. From there, the drive wound beside lakes and streams and over a three-arched bridge. The road passed a motte and a stone cross. In the distance, visitors could view an Ionic Temple of the Winds. Once inside the house, visitors could enjoy the carefully composed landscape from the windows of the drawing room.

Today paths through the woods lead visitors on a lake walk, past some of the gothic follies installed by Trench.



In the 1920s, Colonel Hutchenson Poe hired the world-renowned gardening duo, Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, to create formal gardens around three sides of Heywood House.

The formal gardens they created contrast with breath-taking views of Trench's romantic landscape. A terrace, bordered with flowerbeds, offers views of the surrounding countryside. Another terrace overlooks one of Trench's lakes.

An avenue of pollarded lime trees leads to the sunken garden, where oval terraces descend to a pool containing an enormous fountain.

The top level features a loggia. Inside, a stone tablet bears an inscription from Alexander Pope. This tablet was a feature of Frederick Trench's parkland before it was moved to its present location.

Heywood House burned down in 1950. However, the Salesian Order, which owned the property at that time, saved the gardens. Today they are the best surviving example of Lutyens' work in Ireland.

Heywood Gardens is owned and managed by the Office of Public Works.



Heywood Gardens, Ballinakill
Open during daylight hours
Admission: free
Contact Pat Shortis at 0502 33563 or access
Heywood Gardens at www.heritageireland.ie

EMO COURT

Emo Court demesne is the second largest walled park in Europe, after the Phoenix Park in Dublin. The parkland surrounds Emo Court, a neo-classical mansion designed in 1790 by James Gandon, who is best known for two buildings in Dublin: the Custom House and the Four Courts.



Gandon designed the building and its grounds for the first Earl of Portarlington. The earl died before building was complete, and the property passed through many hands. Finally, in 1969, C.D. Cholmeley-Harrison began to realise Gandon's vision for the house and grounds. Restoration continues today by the Office of Public Works.

Visitors can enjoy walks through the demesne, which includes the longest avenue of Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) in Ireland.

A wooded area called the Clucker features azaleas and rhododendrons. The Grapery contains unusual trees, including weeping beeches and Corsican pines. Trails continue around a 25-acre ornamental lake. Near the sluice gates there is an ornamental temple.

Emo Court, Emo - Open during daylight hours - Admission: free
Phone 0502 26573 or access Emo Court at: www.heritageireland.ie
Dogs are not allowed

GASH GARDENS

In 1984, nurseryman Noel Keenan converted a paddock into a garden. Today, Gash Gardens covers over four acres and is managed by Noel's daughter Mary and her husband Ross.

The gardens feature a collection of unusual plants and fine specimen trees.



The season begins with a display of alpines and rhododendrons. Of particular note is a fuschia-flowered gooseberry (*Ribes speciosum*) that flowers until May. In June, the laburnum tunnel is a highlight. All summer, herbaceous borders and island beds provide a continuous succession of colour. The Persian ironwood (*Parrotia persica*), sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) and Katsura tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*) provide a spectacular seasonal finale.



Water is a linking element throughout the garden. Visitors can sit inside the Moon House and watch water cascade from above. A hidden walkway leads to a looped walk along the River Nore.

Gash Gardens, Castletown, Portlaoise
Open from 1 May to 30 September,
Mondays-Saturdays from 10a.m. to 5p.m.
Sundays by appointment
Admission: €5.00 Phone 0502 32247
Due to the specialist nature of the
gardens, children are not admitted



CASTLE DURROW

Between 1713 and 1732, the Flower Family, Viscounts Ashbrook, built Castle Durrow, one of the great houses of Ireland. In the mid-1990s, Peter and Shelly Stokes renovated Castle Durrow into a fine country house hotel.



Today visitors can wander through the walled organic garden, where a number of old apple trees still produce. All fruit, vegetables and herbs are served in the hotel.

Perennial borders adorn the outside of the walled garden and the terraces. An 18th century pleasure garden of conifers, including a monkey puzzle, leads to a magnificent copper beech. Not far away, a woodland walk is carpeted with bluebells, narcissus or cyclamen, depending on the season.

The courtyard contains Shelly's "Italian Garden," where formal beds restrain a riot of pink, blue and white flowers. As late as November, a salmon-coloured rose, "Jubilee Celebration," still blooms profusely.

A path along the river joins the "Leafy Loops," a series of walks through Durrow's scenic countryside.

Castle Durrow Hotel, Durrow - Open during daylight hours, except from Christmas until mid-January - Admission: free - Phone 0502 36555

ABBEY SENSE GARDEN

In 1842, the Brigidine Sisters founded a convent inside a walled garden in Abbeyleix. Today the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary have made that site into the Abbey Sense Garden, which celebrates the five senses.



A team of people with disabilities, led by head gardener Paul O'Toole, created the garden for everyone to enjoy.

Within the garden, vibrant planting schemes stimulate the sense of sight, while hearing is reached through wind chimes and a humming stone. Strongly scented plants and those with interesting textures are available for visitors to touch and smell.



Mature lime trees anchor the garden. Other features include a rose-covered pergola, a fernery and a hornbeam maze. A long herbaceous border contains unusual plants donated by the National Botanic Gardens in Dublin.



Abbey Sense Garden, Abbeyleix
Open weekdays 9a.m. to 5p.m., closed at 4p.m. on Fridays
In summer months, also open on weekends and Bank Holiday afternoons
Admission: by donation - Phone 0502 31325

LEGACIES OF GARDENERS PAST



A RARE WILDFLOWER

The wooded banks of the Nore River valley are home to the very rare nettle-leaved bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*). No one knows when this flower came to Ireland; it is only found in five areas of the country. The bellflower was once known as Throatwort because its flowers were used to treat sore throats. Another name is Our Lady's Bells, referring to its beautiful blue flowers.

AN EXOTIC BLOW-IN

In the 1850s, owners of big houses, such as Ballyfin House, introduced the Himalayan honeysuckle (*Leycesteria formosa*) into their gardens. Landowners may have planted this native of Asia as a food for pheasants, as well as for its beauty. Today the plant grows in hedgerows throughout Laois.



MEDIEVAL MEDICINE RUN WILD

Certain plants are common near places where people lived during the Middle Ages. In Laois, Alexanders (*Angelica atropurpurea*) is common around Aghaboe Abbey. These wild plants are probably descended from those grown in the monastery garden. Cooks prepared young stems much as asparagus spears. Alexanders was used to treat so many ailments that it was called Masterwort; some believed it could ward off plague.



GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

In 1908, Lady Alice Coote of Ballyfin House gave Murray Hornibrook an unusual double poppy. She said that it had appeared in 1878 in her mother's garden in Kildare. Around 1923 a Dutch grower visiting Hornibrook's garden requested root cuttings and soon *Papaver* "Fireball" was available worldwide. The Fireball does not set seed, but creeps underground. Hornibrook described it as "a beautiful but irascible weed."

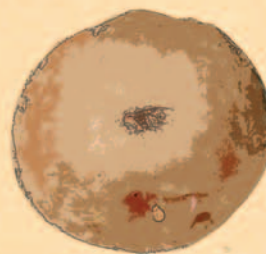
A NATIVE TREASURE

The limey flood plains of the River Barrow, near the Slieve Bloom Mountains, are a treasure trove for botanists. Among the rare plants found there is the bee orchid, *Ophrys abies*, which is native to Ireland. To aid in reproduction, the flower of this orchid evolved to look as much as possible like a female bee. When male bees "mate" with the orchid flowers, they unwittingly leave behind pollen from the other "female bees"—actually orchids in disguise.



A PRACTICAL SOLUTION

Just 50 years after the Great Famine, an enterprising Mountmellick gardener named Miss King developed a new potato, called Flourball. This early maincrop variety has good flavour, produces good yields and, most importantly, is resistant to potato blight. In 1895, Sutton and Sons of England included Flourball in their catalogue. Today the Flourball potato is available to members of Irish Seed Savers.



IN THE PINK

Among the alpine flowers cultivated by Murray Hornibrook at his home near Abbeyleix is *Saxifraga* "Knapton Pink," a late-flowering alpine with mossy foliage. White and red varieties are also available. The plant was developed between 1908 and 1922, when Hornibrook lived in Knapton House.

