

**CONSTRUCTING TOURISM AS A PRODUCT:**  
A local study of Tourism Development in County Laois.

by  
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*Go raibh mile maith agait.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS.

	Preface	
<b>Chapter One:</b>	Introduction	p1.
<b>Chapter Two:</b>	Sociology and Tourism	p7.
<b>Chapter Three:</b>	A Brief History of Tourism in Ireland	p22.
<b>Chapter Four:</b>	Rural Tourism and the Planning of Rural Development	p49.
<b>Chapter Five:</b>	Investigating Tourism in Laois	p72.
<b>Chapter Six:</b>	Tourism in County Laois	p79.
<b>Chapter Seven:</b>	Conclusion	p102.
	Appendices	
	Bibliography	

## **PREFACE.**

Tourism has become a very important industry worldwide in recent decades; as a source of employment, income and foreign currency. Consultant's reports and government policies have highlighted the potential for tourism growth in Ireland since the early eighties. In certain regions where tourism already exists the instigation of further growth consists of new marketing strategies and increasing the product base. However in other regions, where tourism infrastructure and experience are lacking, tourism development is more difficult.

This thesis is a case study of tourism development in such an area: County Laois. The development of tourism has only been pursued in Laois over the last decade by a local voluntary group. Being an inland county, with an unspectacular landscape, has meant that it has been ignored by tourists in the past. Moreover a negative image of the county and the lack of a 'tourism culture' have been identified as the major obstacles to tourism development. Today a range of tourism products and services: accommodation, activities and heritage attractions, are provided for visitors to the county. The tourist industry in Laois provides employment and income for those service providers.

Sociologists have been more critical however in their analysis of the tourism sector. They have highlighted a number of less obvious effects of tourism that ultimately lead to changes in local lifestyle and identity. In this thesis the construction of a tourist sector in Laois is examined. It is argued that tourism development in Laois does involve a number of less tangible processes and approaches, that may ultimately be deconstructing local culture. In this light it is argued that information on tourism's impact locally be gathered and analysed in future tourism development plans.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION.

Tourism has had a major influence on the economic and cultural fortunes of Ireland for over a century. It has been the subject of White Papers, consultants' reports and political manifestos: yet, to date, no single publication has offered a critical overview of the impact of tourism in Ireland (Cronin and O'Connor, 1993 p1).

Tourism in Ireland : A Critical Analysis highlighted the need for a critical approach to tourism. It demonstrated to the reader that many areas and aspects of life are affected by the practice of Tourism. At the end of their introduction the editors called for others to reflect on the ambiguities surrounding tourism. This thesis is concerned with such 'ambiguities' within the tourism sector. While certain regions, coastal towns and cities have enjoyed the economic benefits of tourism for the last two centuries, other areas are only recently coming to realise the potential that exists in their environment for tourism. One such area in Ireland is County Laois, which has made steady progress developing its tourism potential in recent years. The aim of this thesis is to chart this story and to analyse the ambiguities surrounding tourism.

In order to outline the ambiguities and less tangible effects of tourism a number of sociological perspectives are employed. These theories provide a deeper understanding of tourism and its effects on society. For example it may be the case that tourism development may be responsible for eroding traditional cultures and identities. In order to understand how tourism has become so important in Modern Ireland the thesis examines the history of tourism in Ireland. Moreover, 'rural tourism' has also become increasingly important in modern Ireland, as a vehicle for rural regeneration.

Within these developments local groups in Laois have identified the potential for tourism in their county. Conscious efforts have been underway since 1987

and have resulted in a range of tourism products and services available to the tourist. However this thesis is an attempt to highlight less tangible effects of tourism in Laos. Therefore a more cautious approach to tourism development in Laos is called for. This includes the research of local opinion of tourism in Laos.

In Chapter Two the reader is introduced to the sociology of tourism. In the first section a number of different interpretations of tourism are highlighted. These include the state's primarily economic interest in tourism and academic interpretations from geographers, anthropologists and sociologists. The purpose of this section is to highlight the multi-dimensional nature of tourism. In the second section the sociological approach to tourism is explored in greater detail by outlining the main theories. Boorstin has developed a highly critical analysis, where tourism is explained as a false, contrived experience that has lost its former authenticity. Boorstin argues that modern tourism is indicative of the modern world: false and superficial. MacCannell disagrees with Boorstin's negative analysis by arguing that tourism is a modern pilgrimage, a search for authentic cultures and places. However, because this search is obtrusive for the native, a new social space is constructed for the tourist. Here real cultures and lives are 'staged' for tourist consumption. This 'staged-authenticity' arises, necessarily, from the social relations of modern tourism. According to Cohen however there is no single tourist type or experience but a range of different modes within tourism. The type of tourist experience depends on the relationship between the person's 'centre' (the meaning they attach to life) and their societies' 'centre' (the meaning of a society which may be cultural, political or religious or a combination of these). Urry disagrees with this arguing that the tourist experience differs from place to place, yet still a number of basic characteristics always exist. All tourism, according to Urry, involves travelling to another place, staying there for a short period and engaging in

activities, that would not normally be engaged in daily life. Thus the social relations of tourism are in opposition to everyday life and involve much leisure activity. Urry also analyses the growth of the 'heritage centre' in modern tourism. Sociological studies of tourism in Ireland are also outlined, including O'Connor who links the creation of tourist imagery to the construction of Irish identity. Byrne et al have examined the role of 'rural tourism' in Connemara and point out that these projects do not benefit locals economically or culturally. Finally Brett, Sheerin and Mullane have all highlighted the importance of 'heritage centres' in modern tourism. However they are critical of the construction of these exhibitions and the modes of representation that are employed within them. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the sociological interpretation, and to point out that it contains many different perspectives on tourism. This theoretical framework will be used later in examining the role and nature of tourism in County Laois.

Chapter Three details the history of tourism in Ireland, highlighting the main trends and offering explanations for these. The chapter is divided into four sections. Each section corresponds to a particular period of tourism in Ireland. The development of Early Tourism is analysed in the first section. Scenic tours and sea-bathing were the popular activities during this period. In contrast to England, where 'mass tourism' developed, tourism in Ireland remained dominated by the Anglo-Irish elite. The lack of industrialisation has been the main factor used to explain this feature of Early Tourism. The following section focuses on the Inter war period of Irish tourism, where the Anglo-Irish elites' dominance disappeared and a new dominant group, the Catholic commercial, professional and farming class, took over. Holidays became accessible to the industrial labour force during this period also, due mainly to the introduction of paid holidays and the availability of cheaper travel on buses. The next section explains the trends in tourism during the Postwar years. With food shortages

and transport disruption in Britain and Europe during the immediate postwar years Ireland experienced a brief tourism boom. However as these countries rebuilt their services and the Irish economy began to stagnate tourism growth came to a halt in Ireland. The state has been criticised for not encouraging and implementing the infrastructural development of tourism during these years. A new industrial policy however instigated growth to the Irish economy in the early sixties, that supported growth in domestic tourism. This trend is also related to the extension of paid holidays to agricultural workers and the introduction of Bord Failte's grant scheme, which encouraged greater investment in the tourist industry, during this period. However, the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland caused a reversal of this trend in the early seventies. Finally, much of the seventies was spent recovering from these years. In the final section tourism in Modern Ireland is examined. During the early eighties recovery continued from the seventies. Tourism figures began to increase in the late eighties and continued to do so in the nineties (except for 1991). This section also highlights changes in destination choices, that seem to favour Irish holidays over 'sun holidays'. The popularity of these 'rural holidays' provides marginalised rural communities with economic opportunities.

In Chapter Four we explore the history of Rural Development, especially the development of 'rural tourism' as an alternative method of sustaining rural communities. The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section the origins of rural decline are explored; the modernisation of agriculture, the failure of the CAP, the lack of a regional policy and other restructuring forces (industry, services and global capital). The second section focuses on how community based groups attempted to tackle these economic and social problems. However community councils, community co-operatives and community enterprise groups failed, undermined by local apathy, internal



disagreements and a lack of finance. The following section focuses on a number of strategies and programmes, introduced by the EU and the Irish State in order to combat rural stagnation. These programmes are based on local participation in partnership with other interested groups, and seek to develop multi-sectoral projects in communities in order to stimulate rural regeneration. One of the key approaches is the development of rural tourism projects in rural areas. This section outlines the state's insistence of the 'sustainability' of rural tourism. However a number of academic studies have questioned the supposed benefits of rural tourism. They argue that rural tourism does not actually benefit the poorest sections of the community, that it is not always environmentally friendly and finally that it causes cultural change among locals. In the final section, a case study of rural development is analysed. Ballyhoura is chosen because 'rural tourism' is perceived to be instrumental in the drive for economic rejuvenation. However, the case study highlights and exonerates earlier criticisms, that 'rural tourism' alone is not a panacea for rural decline. Instead a community based integrated approach to rural development is necessary. This chapter highlights the way 'rural tourism' has become increasingly important in Modern Ireland. However other sectoral developments are also needed in order to stimulate rural regeneration.

Chapter Five explains how the data used in the thesis was researched. The first section explains what the thesis is about; it is a sociological study of tourism development in Laois. This section presents the case study : County Laois and explains some of the difficulties that must be overcome in the development of tourism in the county. This section also points out that over the last decade, conscious attempts to develop tourism in Laois have been made. The section details the three methods used to gather data on tourism development in Laois - primary research, secondary literature and interviews with people involved with tourism development in Laois. It also explains how

the sample of people interviewed was chosen, and notes the type of questions that they were asked.

Chapter Six presents and analyses the data found on tourism development in Laois. The first of four sections outlines the main obstacles facing tourism development in Laois. The second section charts the work of local groups and state agencies involved in developing tourism in Laois during the last 10 years. This section highlights problems encountered and progress made during the late eighties, two major breakthroughs made in the early nineties and the range of tourism services and products that exist in Laois today. The next two sections analyse these developments. The first highlights a number of processes and approaches incorporated in tourism development that are not so tangible. The second section analyses how sociological perspectives, outlined in chapter two, interpret these tourism products and services. It is discovered that Boorstin and MacCannell's theories are too narrow because they are not universally applicable. On the other hand Cohen's analysis, that is broad, is revealed to be too subjective as information on tourists' motivations for visiting Laois, are not available. Finally, Urry's analysis is discovered to be the most accurate and comprehensive in its coverage. In conclusion, it is argued that while there are obvious advantages from Tourism development in Laois, like the preservation of historic buildings and sites there may also be disadvantages. In the light of certain sociological studies highlighted in this thesis, and the less tangible processes involved in tourism in Laois that have also been outlined more research and caution is required in the planning of future tourism development in Laois.

In the conclusion it is pointed out that there are less tangible effects from the less obvious processes and approaches outlined in chapter six. It is argued that in the light of other sociological studies of tourism in Ireland, that these effects may ultimately be de-constructing local culture.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **SOCIOLOGY AND TOURISM.**

Introduction: This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides an insight into the different interests in tourism: the governments commercial interest and the academics' analysis. The second section provides a detailed description of certain sociological perspectives. While Boorstin and Turner and Ash have been critical of tourism, MacCannell, Cohen and Urry have been more objective in their analysis. O'Connor, Brett and Sheerin provide a sociological analysis of tourism in Ireland. The third section provides some concluding remarks on these theoretical perspectives.

#### **DEFINING TOURISM.**

According to CERT ( 1993, p3 ), the State tourism training agency, the definition of tourism contains three fundamental features:

- \* movement from place of residence
- \* a particular length of stay
- \* a particular purpose.

Moreover, tourism is but one form of recreation that takes up leisure allocated time, and the tourist is a visitor that stays longer than twenty-four hours in an area for any one of the following reasons: to visit friends and relatives; to do business; for leisure, recreation or sport; to experience culture and history; to study, attend a conference or travel for religious or health reasons ( ibid ). Also, tourist visits are commonly motivated by the destinations natural attractions and features. Finally, CERT highlight the importance of the many products that tourists consume to the economy.

According to Pearce ( 1991, p1 ) ... tourism is essentially about people and places. Here the emphasis is on the places visited en route, the destination

itself and the people encountered during this period, locals, fellow tourists and employees in the tourist sector. Pearce also notes that tourism has been differentiated from other forms of leisure due to the travel component, the overnight stay and its economic and commercial importance. Also writers differ on the degree to which other forms of travel, for example business, educational or religious, should be included under tourism ( ibid ).

These definitions and comments on tourism represent two interests in the sector. On the one hand, the state and private entrepreneurs are fundamentally concerned with tourism's commercial value. While others, Geographers and Anthropologists, consider both the benefits and effects of tourism on people and places. Sociologists study peoples attitudes, actions and behaviour in order to develop an understanding of our societies. Because tourism, as a human behaviour, has become especially popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sociologists analyse it in the hope of revealing important information about our society. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the sociological approach to tourism and set out its main theories.

## **SOCIOLOGY AND TOURISM.**

This section provides an insight into how sociologists have interpreted tourism.

Modern tourism as the 'lost art of travel': Boorstin ( 1964 ) is concerned with Americans inability to experience reality. One of the examples of modern superficiality analysed is tourism, in Boorstin's words ... the lost art of travel. According to Boorstin early travel abroad was uncomfortable, difficult and expensive ( p80 ). Moreover early travel was not for fun but ... to become a man of the world and ... required long planning, large expense and great investments of time ( p82 ). Travel involved risks to health and even to life.

Thus travel demanded energy time and money aplenty. In contrast, modern travel has become passive, even the organisation of travel has been minimised today through package tours. Boorstin also points to the comfort and pleasure of modern transportation on railways, ocean liners and aircraft. At the same time these developments have reduced the risks and ensured less expense. The modern tourist is also spared more energy and time with the provision of ... the personally conducted tour. Travel today has taken on another dimension ..

by the middle of the twentieth century foreign travel had become big business ....and had, of course, become a commodity ( p90 ).

In previous centuries the traveller went abroad to encounter the natives. Today, according to Boorstin, the travel agency prevents this encounter ... they are always devising efficient new ways of insulating the tourist from the travel world ( p93 ). For example, on cruises most of the holiday is spent at sea; pre-planned package tours save the tourist from dealing with the natives; while air transport robs the tourist of the landscape

My passage through space was unnoticeable and effortless... I had flown not through space but through time ( p94 ).

Similarly, improved facilities at destinations have further insulated the tourist from the real experience. Modern hotels that contain similar interiors and provide similar facilities, and the self conscious effort to provide local atmosphere at the destination, provide ... an effective insulation from the place where you have gone ( p99 ). Furthermore, attractions offer a false and contrived experience and artefacts on display in museums are seen out of their proper surroundings ( p101 ). For Boorstin there is something fundamentally disingenuous within modern tourism

Formerly when the old-time traveller visited a country whatever he saw was apt to be what really went on there. Now, however, the tourist sees less of the country than of its tourist attractions. Today what he sees is seldom the living culture; but usually specimens collected and embalmed especially for him, or attractions specially staged for him; proved specimens of the artificial ( p102 ).

Boorstin has been criticised for adopting the 'evolutionary' approach, that perceives tourism to develop along a continuum of polarised variables ( see Cohen and Dann in *Annals of Tourism Research* 1991, p159 ). In other words Boorstin's' approach contains an unwarranted assumption about the unilinearity of the process. MacCannell has also criticised Boorstin's' analysis. Firstly for its snobbishness

he only expresses a long standing touristic attitude, a pronounced dislike for other tourists, an attitude that turns man against man in a they-are-the-tourists-I-am-not-equation ( *AJS* 1973, p602 ).

Secondly MacCannell maintains that Boorstin neglected what might have been a structural analysis ... by falling back onto individual-level interpretations before analysing fully his pseudo-event conception ( *ibid*, p600 ).

Turner and Ash ( 1975 ) are also critical of tourism. They highlight the disparity within the tourist sector, between a highly routinised industry and the high level of quality expected by the tourist. Located in the Dependency and World Systems perspective, they equate modern tourism with neo-Colonialism, identifying powerful international corporations, airline companies, tour operators and hotel groups, exploiting third world and peripheral cultures.

Searching for Authenticity: MacCannell ( in *AJS* 1973, and 1976 ) has developed a more positive perspective on tourism.

The motive behind a pilgrimage is similar to that behind a tour, both are quests for authentic experiences. Pilgrims attempted to visit a place where an event of religious importance actually occurred. Tourists present themselves at places of social, historical and cultural importance ( in *AJS* 1973, p593 ).

For MacCannell modern tourism is a quest for Authenticity, a modern pilgrimage or according to Urry ... a modern version of the universal human concern with the sacred ( 1990, p8 ). The tourist seeks reality ( or human

essence ) in other places and other times. Modern superficiality obscures the essence of the tourists own lives and they look to the 'real lives' of others for meaning ( authenticity ).

MacCannell also highlights the particular social relations deriving from this fascination with the 'real lives' of others. Because these tourists become obtrusive and unacceptable, the locals and tourist entrepreneurs construct new spaces that contain so called 'real lives'. Within this constructed space ( or 'staged authenticity' ) the tourist experience is carried out. MacCannell gives the example of a visit to Cape Kennedy during the Apollo 13 mission, where the visiting party could see and hear the correspondents at work with mission control, but from a different room. Obviously their tour did not take the visitors through the real working areas.

This type of experience is produced through the use of a new kind of social space that is opening up everywhere in our society. It is a space for outsiders who are permitted to view details of the inner operation of a commercial, domestic, industrial or public institution ( *ibid*, p596 ).

While Boorstin argued that 'pseudo-events' arose from individual need and desire for false and contrived attractions, MacCannell argues that 'staged authenticity' is a derivative of the peculiarity of the social relations of tourism. That is, the locals and entrepreneurs construct such attractions to avoid the obtrusiveness of tourists, but also to satisfy the tourists quest for authenticity.

MacCannell also highlighted three distinguishing features of the tourism industry: firstly, while the religious pilgrim visits only one sacred place, the tourist travels to numerous locations. Secondly, each tourist location must occasionally reproduce itself in order to continually attract the visitors, unlike the religious attraction that remains unchanged. Thirdly, intending objects of the tourist gaze undergo a process of sacralisation, that involves naming; framing and elevating; and mechanically and socially reproducing the object or site.

MacCannell has been criticised ( see Dann and Cohen 1990, and Schudson 1979 ) on two points. Firstly as the tourists quest for authenticity is due to their late modern situation his level of analysis is structural. This is questioned because the arguments are not always supported with empirical evidence. Secondly, further theoretical difficulties in MacCannell's model exist, surrounding his inability to demarcate clearly 'the Centre' and 'the Other' of society and the omission of natural attractions such as beaches, deserts and jungles from the study.

A Phenomenology of touristic experiences: Cohen ( 1979 ) argues that there is no single tourist, but a variety of tourist types and tourist experiences. He provides empirical evidence for both; Boorstin's 'pseudo-event' seeking tourist in the ... sedate, middle-class, middle-aged tourists, and MacCannell's authenticity seeking tourists in ... young "post- modern" tourists ( ibid, p180 ). Thus

different kinds of people may desire different modes of touristic experience: hence "the tourist" does not exist as a type ( ibid ).

Cohen's argument stems from the notion that both individuals and society have centers that give them meaning. The 'spiritual' center of the individual is commonly religious or cultural, while societies center may be one or a combination of the political, religious or cultural. However to assume that modern people adhere to their societies centers is simplistic. Cohen outlines four types of relationships, between the alienated person and society. Firstly, certain individual's lives have no meaning ( center ), thus they do not search for any locus of that meaning. Secondly, others that have similarly lost meaning in their lives, try to take part in other peoples lives that appear meaningful. Thirdly, some peoples lives have many meanings and fourthly some believe that their meaning lies in another society. For Cohen then

within the context of each of these possible types of attitude to the center,



tourism will be endowed with a different significance ( ibid, p182 ).

Cohen has constructed five models of touristic experience.

1. Within the Recreational mode the trip is a recreational experience that restores the traveler's general health. The traveller is not interested in other cultures, societies or natural landscapes, at least not directly. Rather, anything that entertains and is pleasurable is the attraction. As the trip restores the traveller it is a move away from his center in order to reinforce adherence to the center. This is a typical structural functionalist analysis.

2. People in the Diversionary mode have meaningless lives and thus do not adhere to any center. Their trip is just a diversion away from the boredom and banality of everyday life. It is not a trip to restore because there is no meaning ... it is the meaningless pleasure of a center-less person ( ibid, p186 ).

3. The Experiential mode consists of alienated individuals who have realised their situation. Their search for meaning may take them to revolution, but less radically to look at 'meaning' in the lives of others. By travelling they derive enjoyment and reassurance that other lives are meaningful.

4. People in the Experimental mode do not believe in the spiritual center of their own society, but engage in a quest for an alternative in many different directions. They try out alternative lifestyles, for example mysticism, drugs and tourism. This traveller engages in authentic livelihoods, sampling and comparing without fully committing, hoping to eventually find one that suits his needs. Often ... in search for himself not knowing what his real needs and beliefs are. In extreme cases the search itself becomes a way of life having lost the faculty for making choices, they become eternal seekers.

5. The Existential mode consists of people whose center is in a different religion or culture. Either they choose to participate fully or, if the permanent changeover is not possible, they must become 'tourists' to their centers for short periods at a time.

In a later article Cohen ( 1984 ) has claimed that work on the sociology of tourism could be classified into four main issue areas: tourists themselves; interaction of tourists and locals; the tourist system; and tourism impacts. In conclusion Cohen points out that the sociology of tourism has failed to integrate theory and method.

The Tourist Gaze: Urry ( 1990, p10-12 ) disagrees with MacCannell's analysis: that the search for authenticity is the basis of tourism and that the social relations of tourism necessarily create a 'staged authenticity'. Urry notes that tourism's social relations are different from those in everyday life. Therefore it is these liminal activities and zones [ *see Shields ( 1990 ) for an insightful analysis of liminality, where the codes of normal social experience are reversed* ] that are the crucial features of tourism.

Furthermore because the tourist gaze is constructed in opposition to everyday social experiences, there is no single tourist gaze, instead it varies across societies, social groups and historical periods. However in spite of this ... there are some minimal characteristics and social practices ( Urry 1990, p2 ) of the tourist gaze:

- \* tourism is a leisure activity, that necessitates its opposite, organised work,

- \* tourism involves travelling through space and staying in a certain destination for a period of time. These destinations are outside the normal places of residence and work, while the stay is short-term and temporary,

- \* the places gazed upon offer some contrasts visually with the place of residence and work, indeed the gaze is directed at specific features of the landscape and townscape that differentiate them from everyday scenes.

In modern tourism Urry notes that a substantial proportion of the population engage the tourist gaze. The mass nature of modern tourism necessitates

new socialised forms of provision. The anticipation of intense pleasure, created through day dreaming and the media, plays a central role in choosing certain destinations. Modern tourism also involves the collection of signs, of romantic Paris, olde England or the Emerald Isle for example. The tourist may briefly experience such signs or visually capture them with photographs and postcards. Finally the objects of the tourist gaze are produced by a group of tourist professionals. According to Urry the nature of these objects is decided by

on the one hand competition between interests involved in the provision of such objects and on the other hand changing class gender and generational distinctions of taste within the population of visitors ( ibid, p4 ).

Urry also explores the historical development of tourism in England ( ibid, p16-39 ). The social elite were the first to visit English coastal towns for the medicinal benefits of sea-bathing. But the democratisation of travel in the nineteenth century opened sea-side resorts up to the industrial working classes. The introduction of paid holidays and further increases in transport technology ensured the growth of 'mass tourism' continued in the twentieth century. Thus the sea-side remained ... the predominant form of holiday in Britain up to the Second World War ( p26 ). Their popularity continued during the fifties and sixties, but began to decline during the later post-war decades.

According to Urry this was due to the following: a decline in the extraordinary character of piers and towers, funfairs and pleasure parks, camps and the seaside itself. Indeed the sun had overtaken the sea in importance and could be guaranteed at Mediterranean resorts, that eventually were affordably packaged for the working class tourist.

Urry also introduces three key dichotomies of the tourist gaze: the historical/ modern; the authentic/ inauthentic; and ( a new dimension ) the romantic/ collective. The romantic gaze is directed at natural objects, such

as the sea and the landscape. These objects are symbols of real beauty and gazing on them creates a semi-spiritual relationship between the tourist and the object. On the other hand the collective gaze necessitates the presence of numerous other tourists. In this scenario it is the crowd that gives the place a carnival atmosphere.

Urry also analyses contemporary tourism ( p82-103 ). There has been fundamental changes in social organisation, a dissolving of barriers between cultures and between culture and everyday life. Thus tourism activities are not as discernible as previously.

This has the effect, as 'tourism' per se declines in specificity, of universalising the tourist gaze - people are much of the time 'tourists' whether they like it or not ( p82 ).

Within these changes in contemporary tourism, Urry has highlighted the rise of the heritage centre. Their classification in terms of the three key dichotomies is complex. Clearly it is not obvious whether they are really 'authentic' and 'historical' ( p104 ). The recent growth of heritage centres in England is linked to a tradition of conserving the traditional countryside, the rapid de-industrialisation in the late seventies and eighties that created a sense of loss for a bygone technology and social life. De-industrialisation also ensured that large numbers of Victorian buildings became available for alternative use. Finally, the unattractive character of modern architecture in England also strengthened heritage preservation. While the heritage industry has played an important role among local authority efforts at economic development, Urry is concerned with

the predominant emphasis on visualisation, on presenting the visitor with an array of artefacts, including buildings, and then trying to visualize the patterns of life that would have emerged around them. This is essentially an "artefactual" history, in which a whole variety of social experiences are necessarily ignored or trivialised, such a war, exploitation, hunger, disease the law and so on ( ibid, p112 ).

### Tourist Imagery and the construction of National Identity in Ireland:

O'Connor ( 1993, p68-85 ) identifies certain aspects of Irish culture that have been selected for the promotion of tourist images of Ireland as a pre-modern society, such as easiness, friendliness and backwardness. These features are highlighted in the postcards and promotional brochures of Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish people, their history and the landscape have also been coloured in a specific way in tourist imagery. O'Connor argues that these tourist images have been partly responsible for the construction of an image of Ireland as the 'other' of the modern cosmopolitan centres of Europe and America. Crucially however such constructions have a negative effect on local identity and self-worth, and also on their interaction with the tourist, who as a result is often disliked. In conclusion, O'Connor argues that a more critical approach to tourism development in Ireland is required in order to highlight possible negative consequences.

The Heritage Industry in Ireland: According to Brett ( 1993, p183-202 ) and Sheerin ( in Peillon and Salter 1998, p39-48 ), historical theme parks and visual interpretive centres have emerged as an important part of Ireland's tourism sector during the nineties. Their popularity and significance are maintained by professional courses in 'heritage studies' and 'heritage management', and validated in tourism promotions and government publications. Moreover, Brett notes that

This is not a small matter in any country, but in Ireland, with high general unemployment and areas of acute deprivation, the promotion of local history through special exhibitions and parks is an important part of the tourist economy: itself an essential part of the natural economy ( p183 ).

But Brett and Sheerin have identified a number of side effects from ... providing visitors with an immediate confrontation with the past ( Sheerin 1998, p33 ). The first concerns the physical location of certain interpretive centres in

visually appealing natural environments. Opponents argue that such constructions diminish the visual quality of the surrounding area. The second problem concerns the formulation of the presentation within the heritage centre. With so-called professionals making the important decisions, local participation may be non-existent and thus the end product is a heritage as seen from the outside. In this scenario the locals' insight, which is crucial, is absent and the representation is misleading. The third problem surrounds the communication of information within the heritage centre. Here the emphasis is on visualisation and entertainment or the provision of instant pleasurable experiences for visitors instead of the educational value. Once more the actual history of the area is sacrificed, this time in order to provide a spectacle. Sheerin notes that such visual presentations are deeply rooted in pre-existing regimes of representation: such as eighteenth and nineteenth century travel writing; and more recently, postcards and tourism brochures, that produced a very selective aesthetic representation of Ireland. Crucially such regimes of representation constitute pre-existing images of Ireland forged elsewhere.

Excluding local input and creating a heritage that meets visitor expectations ultimately undermines the importance of local identity.

If we are not critical it will become a normative practice creating a de-problematised pseudo-history. This constitutes a loss of self - a 'for-others' consciousness which reduces the subjects to participants in their own spectacle ( Brett 1993, p202 ).

According to Mullane ( in Breathnach 1994, p79-86 ) the absence of an overall plan for the development and management of heritage in Ireland has produced ... and uncoordinated and unscientific approach to heritage exploitation ( p79 ). She criticises the Office of Public Works ( OPW ) for maintaining a conservative approach to tourism development in Ireland: where social interaction is not utilised, despite the fact that it creates better understanding;

where the cultural significance and attachment to the natural environment are not highlighted; and because the interpretative centre isolates the visitor from the natural environment. Mullane also argues that better results would be achieved if the displays were more entertaining.

In conclusion, therefore, we may suggest that interpretation of heritage in Ireland may be more effective in reinforcing traditional bias in employment patterns and distancing communities from heritage than in promoting understanding, appreciation, and protection of heritage ( 1994, p85-6 ).

## **CONCLUSION.**

Tourism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that incorporates many different interests. For example, the state primarily seeks to promote tourism because of its employment potential while economists point to tourism's' growing contribution to the national exchequer. A range of academic perspectives also exist: the geographer analyses the physical effects of tourism while the anthropologist studies tourism's' effect on cultures and tribes. Thus sociology, which studies the impact of tourism at societal and group level, is but one of several interpretations of tourism. Moreover, within sociology no single perspective can claim a monopoly in providing an understanding of tourism. But

...the insights contributed by various approaches .. when assembled can supply the basis of a pluralistic sociological interpretation of touristic reality ( Dann and Cohen 1991, p167 ).

This chapter provides an outline of certain sociological perspectives.

Boorstin's concept of the 'pseudo-event' in America informs his opinion of modern tourism . He argues that comfort, pleasure and contrived attractions are characteristics of modern tourism. Thus Americans are unable to sample the real experience. However Boorstin is criticised for engaging a snobbish and subjective level of analysis, while also maintaining an unwarranted belief in the unilinearity of the process. Turner and Ash have

also criticised modern tourism: highlighting the disparity between a highly routinised industry and tourist expectations. Their criticism also highlights the neo-colonial structure of the tourism industry.

MacCannell provides a more positive and objective view of the tourist. Here tourism is akin to a pilgrimage, but while the pilgrimage was a search for religious meaning the tourist is in search of cultural meaning.

MacCannell also notes that a new 'social space' is arising from the social relations of tourism. In order to protect the 'real lives' of ordinary people and satisfy the tourists 'quest for authenticity', a staged authenticity is constructed. MacCannell's work has lacked empirical support because his level of analysis is structural. Also his theoretical formulation is not concise, a major difficulty arises in trying to demarcate clearly the 'centre' and the 'other' in society.

Cohen's analysis begins with identifying the individual's 'centre' and society's 'centre' or 'multiple centres'. His model of the types of touristic experience is developed around the nature of the relationship between the individual and his 'center'. Cohen's theory is highly speculative and while he does provide certain examples the link between the theory and reality is not concrete. Moreover these theoretical formulations have been overlooked in tourism research.

Urry has provided a historical analysis of the changing tourism sector. His theory argues that while tourism activities may vary considerably there are certain basic characteristics. These include the journey to a different place where gazing on the landscape and townscape is the central activity. Urry emphasises the difference between everyday social relations and those of the tourist. His analysis also includes a historical study of the development of 'mass tourism' in England, its decline and the evolution of contemporary tourism. Finally Urry highlights the growth of heritage centres and sounds a



warning for their implications concerning the inaccurate reproduction of past lives.

Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis ( 1993 ) provides a platform for critical discussion of Tourism in modern Ireland. O'Connor highlights the connection between the production of 'tourist imagery', that portrays Ireland as a pre-modern society, and the construction of national identity. O'Connor argues that a more critical approach to tourism development is necessary.

Brett and Sheerin are critical of the 'heritage industry' in Ireland. They argue that the lack of local participation in the development of 'heritage representations' undermines the locals' identity because an incomplete picture of their history has been created. They also argue that the use of the 'visual' as a mode of communication in the 'heritage centre' elevates the enjoyment of the presentation above its educational role. However Mullane has argued that a lack of entertainment in the OPW's heritage centres contributes to a lack of understanding of their displays. Also because these centres fail to incorporate social action and isolate the visitor from the natural environment they ultimately fail to educate the visitor.

These sociological perspectives will be adapted to the case study in order to critically examine tourism development in Laois.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF TOURISM IN IRELAND:**

#### **1750 - 1996.**

Introduction: This chapter traces the historical growth of tourism in Ireland, in order to provide a background to the development of tourism in Ireland. The chapter provides a chronological analysis of the history of Irish tourism, highlighting significant trends and features and providing explanations for these. This approach is maintained throughout the chapter's four main sections, each of which comprises a chosen period with distinct trends and features. Also, the singularity of the Irish case is highlighted throughout the chapter through comparison with British and European tourism development.

#### **EARLY TOURISM IN IRELAND.**

This section traces the growth of spa, sea-side and scenic tourism in Ireland, during the period beginning around the mid-eighteenth century and ending at the start of the First World War. This specific period is chosen because it is characterised by the perseverance of the Upper class's domination of tourism, or in the case of Ireland the Anglo-Irish elite's domination of sea-side resorts and scenic landscapes. The section focuses on two studies on Irish sea-side resorts in this period; one is by John Heuston entitled ' Kilkee; the origins and development of a west coast resort ', and the other is by K. M. Davies entitled ' For Health and Pleasure in the British Fashion; Bray Co. Wicklow as a Tourist Resort, 1750 - 1914 ' ( both papers are published in Cronin and O'Connor, 1993 ).

The section begins by arguing that early tourism in Ireland developed along similar lines as the English case ( Urry, 1990 ); from spas and baths to sea-side resorts based on their ... supposed health giving properties , and the popularity of scenic tourism associated with gazing on beautiful landscapes. From there however the similarities become more uncommon; most notably nineteenth century tourism in England is characterised by the emergence of what Urry called 'mass tourism'. For example, Shields describes Brighton's transformation from ... medicalised bathing beach and its attached social promenade to ... the carnivalisation of the beach through mass seaside day holidays ( 1991, p73-101 ). However during the same period, Irish tourism remained dominated by the Anglo-Irish elite. Finally, the coming of the railways to these resorts and a lack of industrialisation in Ireland are briefly analysed in an attempt to explain the non-appearance of mass tourism in Ireland during this period.

#### The Development of early tourism in Ireland - spas, sea-side resorts and scenic tourism.

Lucan, Mallow and Castleconnell, according to Heuston, had developed spas during the eighteenth century ( Cronin & O'Connor 1993, p14 ). The basis of their popularity was the medical professions approval of the spa's mineral waters as possessing ... health giving properties . Not surprisingly this approval formed the bedrock for the success of sea-side resorts at Tramore, Skeries, Malahide, Kilkee and Bray. In the case of the latter two, Kilkee and Bray, another significant factor in their success was their close proximity to scenic landscapes. In the case of Bray, it lay on the route from Dublin to the Wicklow Mountains, while Kilkee was within walking distance from the rugged west coast of Clare.

The large towns of Bray and Kilkee of today were, prior to their escalation as sea-side resorts and scenic touring centers, quite small villages. Kilkee,

according to Heuston was .. initially no more than a tiny fishing community ( ibid, p14 ). Similarly Bray of the mid-eighteenth century consisted ... of a church, barracks, mill and a cluster of houses and ... was otherwise separated from the coast by a largely unpopulated area of green fields according to Davies ( ibid, p30 ). Heuston believes a number of factors were responsible for Kilkee's development into a ... fashionable Victorian sea-side resort ( ibid, p15 ).

Firstly, the growing respect for sea bathing as a healthy activity and the ideal conditions at Kilkee with its ... sheltered, shallow bay and safe strand ( ibid, p15 ), complemented each other. Secondly Heuston points out that Kilkee was an obvious choice due to its proximity to the ...wild and isolated west coast of Clare ( ibid, p14 ) for scenic tourism, stimulated by Romantic intellectuals of the time. Thirdly, Kilkee's beauty and natural conduciveness to tourism was receiving publicity ( ibid, p15 ); from travel writers such as Lloyd ( 1780 ) and from advertisements for the renting of houses in the Ennis Chronicle ( 1795 ). Fourthly, while Kilkee was a considerable distance from the nearest large urban centre, Limerick, and with roads virtually non-existent, ease of access was ensured by ... travelling by boat from Limerick to Kilrush and completing the journey by carriage or open car ( ibid, p15 ).

Similar reasons can be detected behind the development of Bray into a successful sea-side resort according to Davies ( ibid, p29-48 ). Notably the Romantic movement's interest in natural landscapes and the growing fashion for sea bathing played central roles in Bray's transition. Also noted as important were improvements to the road between Dublin and Bray. Furthermore Bray had a unique advantage over other developing resorts at the time ... without the Quin familys' initiative Bray would have been a less desirable stopping point for travelers touring Wicklow ( ibid, p36 ). Davies believes that Quin's hotel and the proximity of the sea-side ensured that Bray developed as ... the gateway to the

garden of Ireland and not Enniskerry, which was a more attractive ... estate village located in the picturesque Gash of the Scalp ( ibid, p31 ).

Therefore early tourism in Ireland developed from similar circumstances to tourism in Britain ( see Urry 1990, p16-39 ); Both cases began initially with the development of spas and baths, soon this - bathing in mineral waters - became a recommended health giving activity, supported by the medical profession. Subsequently the salt waters of the sea became popular for similar reasons and finally social activities and entertainment became essential ingredients in the resort's social life. However from this point on differences begin to emerge between the Irish and British resort's development pattern.

#### Upper class domination of nineteenth century tourism in Ireland.

According to Urry ( 1990, p16 ), sea-side resorts came to be frequented by increasing numbers of urban working class people in the North of England in the second half of the nineteenth century. However this ' mass tourism ', as Urry called it, was not experienced in Ireland during this period. In fact the Irish case exhibits a stark contrast to its neighbour in this respect, because Irish resorts remained the exclusive remit of the Anglo-Irish elite.

Evidence for the socially constrictive nature of Irish resorts is found in the studies of Bray and Kilkee. The Anglo-Irish domination was maintained in Kilkee through ... the urban pattern of socialising Kilkee provided its visitors with - balls, concerts, dances, races. But also because

many of the families at Kilkee would have been related by kinship and religious affiliation, or would have been known to each other through meeting at the resort during successive seasons  
( Heuston, in Cronin & O'Connor 1993, p17-8 ).

Similarly, in Bray according to Davies

there were many events of an occasional nature, some open to all, some requiring an entrance fee: sports meetings and military band concerts on the promenade, boating regattas with fireworks displays, archery and athletics competitions, cricket and croquet matches, athletics and flower

shows in the Carlisle Grounds ( ibid, p39 )

- such activities being synonymous with the upper class or in the Irish case the Anglo-Irish elite. For the lower class it was not just the case that holidays were too expensive but rather, as Heuston points out

During the 1800's, the majority of the Irish population would not have even contemplated a period of time away from home for the purpose of rest and recreation. For the ordinary people, a 'holiday' was an outing to a fair, a 'patron', perhaps a race meeting or a football or a hurling match ( ibid, p16 ).

### The coming of the Railways.

In Britain, according to Urry ( 1990, p21-2 ), the arrival of the railways to sea-side resorts played an instrumental part in opening up these resorts to the industrial working classes from the North of England in the second half of the nineteenth century. Accessibility to rail travel for this class, through Gladstone's Railway Act of 1844, paved the way for what Urry called ' Mass Tourism ' in England. Unfortunately the spread of railways to resorts in Ireland did not herald similar repercussions.

Heuston points out that eventually after the railway reached Kilkee in 1892

there was little perceptible change in the social make-up of the holidaymakers who stayed at the resort. They came from the same upper class Limerick and rural backgrounds - with a sprinkling of Gentry ( in Cronin & O'Connor 1993, p20 ).

Curtin and Varley note, in their study of Angling Tourism in South Mayo ( in Curtin & Wilson eds. 1987; p. 207 ), how the arrival of the railway to Ballinrobe in 1892 provided many of the locals with an ancillary source of income with the demand for boats, gillies and accommodation. However the tourists consisted mainly of English Gentry and not native Irish.

According to Moylan ( Blackrock Teachers Centre 1989, p54 ), the developers and promoters of Bray consciously saw the railway as the perfect opportunity to develop Bray into a prestigious resort similar to Brighton.

Davies ( in Cronin and O'Connor 1993, p39 ) notes that the railways' arrival stimulated an increasing number of day-trippers and excursionists to Bray. However these day trippers differed greatly from the holidaymakers; firstly holidaymakers stayed at the resort for a weekend, a week or a whole summer whilst the day tripper stayed for the day or at most overnight; secondly the holidaymakers took part in the exclusive social life of the resort, that is the dances, balls, parties, croquet and cricket matches; and finally, the holidaymakers consisted mainly of the upper or ruling elite, the wealthy businessmen, whereas the excursionists were mostly native labourers or rural underclass. But for the most part the arrival of the railway to Bray accommodated ... the nobility and gentry ... and the upper middle class ... for permanent residence or summer homes according to Flynn ( 1985, p1 ).

#### Industrialisation and ' Mass tourism ' in Ireland during the nineteenth century.

In conclusion, while the case of Ireland is similar to that of its neighbour, England, in regards to the early development of tourism, that is sea-side and scenic tours, the subsequent speed and direction of tourism in both cases developed quite differently. Most notably, the development of the rail network in England has supported the move to what Urry ( 1990 ) called 'mass tourism', especially in the North of England. However the growth of a railway network in Ireland served more to marginalise the lower income communities rather than to incorporate them. It may be argued that in Ireland one crucial factor, a large urban working class, had not developed, as had been the case in England.

According to O'Hagin and McStay -

from the 1800 Union with Britain and its industrial dominance, Ireland's credibility as a competitive rival was seriously in doubt... and thus during the remainder of the nineteenth century, conditions for speedy, extensive and successful industrialisation simply did not exist ( 1981, p9-10 ).

Essentially, Ireland remained primarily an agricultural country during the nineteenth century, while Britain developed an extensive manufacturing arm which supported a large industrial working population. Subsequently, reduced working hours, increases in weekly wages, the introduction of holidays with pay and the provision for working class travel on the railways from 1844, enabled many of this large working class in Britain visit the sea side resorts on holidays ( Urry 1990, p18-21 ). However the case of Ireland provides a stark contrast; invariably union with Britain ensured that industrialisation never developed significantly enough to overshadow agriculture, as the largest employer, during the nineteenth century. Subsequently, as Heuston points out -

unlike England, where the coming of the railways had democratised travel, enabling thousands of working class people to visit seaside resorts, the general level of poverty in Ireland before the First World War and the absence of paid holiday leave, meant that taking a holiday was totally beyond the expectations of the vast majority of the population ( 1993, p22 ).

A final point on tourism during this period concerns Urrys' distinction between the 'romantic' and 'collective' gazes. The habits of the Anglo- Irish elite portrayed in both studies on Bray and Kilkee concur with Urry's classification: on the one hand their excursions into the countryside of Wicklow may be interpreted as 'romantic' gazing, while participation in the many social activities arranged around the resort constitutes 'collective' gazing.

### **IRISH TOURISM DURING THE INTER-WAR YEARS.**

The second section on the historical patterns of tourism in Ireland focuses on the Inter War period, that is the years 1918 to 1939. Two trends are identified in the literature regarding tourism in Ireland during this period. The first trend concerns the dwindling numbers of English and Anglo Irish tourists, that had dominated tourism in the nineteenth century. The second trend that emerges, details the growth of a newly dominant Irish middle class at seaside resorts



during the period. Also associated with this trend are the increasing numbers of lower-middle and working class people at such resorts on day excursions, and subsequently, the nature of tourist activities themselves changed to popular entertainment, with the previous air of sophistication disappearing. Both trends are located within the rapidly changing political and social structure of early twentieth century Ireland. The transition to a Free State society, the emergence of bus travel and the introduction of legislation regarding holidays ( public, church and paid annual leave ), are all features considered essential for explaining the emergence of both trends.

### The decline of the English and Anglo Irish population.

In Britain during the interwar period, according to Urry ... everyone had become entitled to the pleasures of the 'tourist gaze' ( 1990, p27 ). Similarly Burkart and Medlik have argued that -

the annual holiday was established during the interwar years as a reality for a considerable part of the population and as a realizable goal for all ( 1974, p25 ).

Therefore the growth of what Urry called 'mass tourism' in the late nineteenth century had developed into a national phenomenon by the interwar period. However a similar fate had not fallen on the working populations in Ireland. But a certain development was discernible in the Irish case during the interwar period.

Firstly, Ireland did experience a dramatic reduction in the numbers of English and Anglo Irish on holidays. This breakdown of their domination of early tourism was undoubtedly a reflection of their decreasing numbers in the population on the island. Heuston points out that

the Anglo-Irish gentry, the professional and merchant families who formed the backbone of Kilkee's pre-war clientele, became even scarcer at the resort during the 1920's and the 1930's ( in Cronin & O'Connor 1993, p22 ).

Similarly Curtin and Varley point out that

English anglers apparently decreased in number during the Great War and during the subsequent Anglo-Irish War and Civil War ( in Curtin and Wilson eds 1987, p209 ).

Arguments for this decline centre around the First World War - when many English residents in Ireland were enlisted into the British army and possibly never returned to Ireland. More importantly, the nationalist fervor aroused following the War of Independence, especially from the execution of the rebels involved in the 1916 Rising and in response to the brutality of the Black and Tans, could not have created a sanguine outlook for English or Anglo-Irish residents in the newly formed Free State after 1922. For example according to Flynn, in January following the signing of the Treaty of 1921 the military and RIC vacated their premises in the town ( 1986, p86-102 ).

#### Holidays for middle, lower-middle and working classes between the wars.

The second significant trend during this period of tourism in Ireland saw increasing numbers of ... the newly dominant grouping in the post-Independence Free State, the Catholic commercial, professional and farming classes ( Heuston, in Cronin & O'Connor 1993, p22 ) visit Irish seaside resorts. Furthermore, lower middle and working class numbers increased at similar resorts during this period, but for shorter holidays ( ibid ).

Burkart and Medlik have associated the high point of bus and coach services in Britain, during the interwar period, with the popularity of seaside resorts for the working classes ( 1974, p29 ). Similarly Heuston points to the importance of bus transport in opening up Kilkee to the lower-middle and working classes, by providing a cheaper and faster alternative to rail travel ( in Cronin and O'Connor 1993, p22 ). Essentially, improvements to the roads, the refinement of the combustion engine, the availability of numerous persons capable of driving buses after the First World War and also the extensive network that bus

services could provide ensured that it could compete with the slow, unpunctual and more expensive railways.

The interwar period also saw the introduction of paid holidays for many workers. In Britain, Burkart and Medlik note that ... in 1939 some eleven million people were covered by the Holidays with Pay Act 1939 ( 1974, p25 ). Not surprisingly Heuston believes that

the introduction of paid holiday leave in the mid - 1930's encouraged the trend whereby young men and women could holiday at Irish resorts ( in Cronin & O'Connor 1993, p23 ).

Indeed the new Free State government was quick to act in this area; the Public Holidays Act 1924 ( Government of Ireland, 1926, p827-9 ) proclaimed the right of the government; firstly, to appoint any day chosen to be a public holiday, and secondly, to cancel any day previously enacted as a public holiday. In effect this act amended previous statutes pertaining to holiday rights enacted during British rule of Ireland : the Bank Holidays Act, 1871, the Holidays Extension Act, 1875, and the Bank Holiday ( Ireland ) Act, 1903 ( ibid ).

The first piece of legislation for holidays with pay for lower income workers was passed by the Fianna Fail government which came to power in the Free State in 1932. Their economic programme of self-sufficiency, through tariff protection for agriculture and industrialisation through import substitution, led to a 30 percent increase in manufacturing and a 40 percent increase in employment

( Munck 1985, p27 ). Such increases in industrial employment brought pressure on the government to grant this section of the workforce holidays with pay. Not surprisingly the Conditions of Employment Act, 1936 entitled such workers to six public holidays and six days annual leave with pay for each year of employment ( Government of Ireland 1937, p15- 21 ). The act also clearly

defined who was to be considered an industrial worker, unfortunately this specification omitted a larger section of the lower-income workers from the agricultural sector.

The 1938 Shop ( Conditions of Employment ) Act extended six public holidays and six days annual leave to workers in the retail trade industry, with twelve days annual leave for workers in special trade shops ( Government of Ireland 1939, p103-4 and p107-25 ). This act also proclaimed weekly-half holidays for shop workers and compensatory holidays for workers in public houses ( *ibid* ).

Thus by the late 1930's holidays in Ireland were no longer confined to the social elite. Firstly events surrounding the establishment of the Free State created a hostile atmosphere for English and Anglo Irish residents. Subsequently their numbers decreased and a new Ascendancy was formed, consisting of catholic, commercial and professional, middle class Irish. Secondly, the formation of the new state was concerned with the extension of basic rights to its citizens, such as the right to vote, to work and to education. Eventually with a slight upturn in the economy and increases in employment through growth in manufacturing the fledgling state had developed its first industrial workforce. Subsequently the government declared the right of these and other workers to annual leave with pay. Thus for the first time low-income earners in Ireland were entitled under law to holidays, unfortunately agricultural workers, comprising the largest group, had to wait until 1950 to receive similar holiday rights. However Bray appears to have been an exception, remaining upper class and expensive and retaining the mantle of 'the Brighton of Ireland' according to Flynn ( 1986 ).

Therefore tourism between the two World Wars was not as restrictive as was the case in the nineteenth century. The development of bus transport or coach

services provided a practical means of transport for lower income families.

Heuston has captured the essence of the period's tourist trends;

a gulf remained between those who could afford to reside at the resort for one, two or more weeks, and those who had to be content with a day trip by excursion train or bus ( in Cronin & O'Connor 1993, p22 ).

## **1945 -1980: TOURISM IN POST-WAR IRELAND.**

Using the growth in international arrivals and domestic trips worldwide, Keane and Quin ( 1990, p3 ) have argued that the growth of tourism during the postwar period has ensured that it has become a major industry around the globe. Gillmor believes that

greater affluence, more leisure time, improved transport, increased population and urbanisation, stronger desires to travel, and greater tourism organisation and promotion ( Kockel 1994, p19 )

have contributed generally to this development of tourism internationally.

In Ireland during the postwar period, tourism revenue and visitor numbers have not been continuously increasing. Rather, the growth of the tourist industry has been subject to fluctuations and interruptions in postwar Ireland. This section chronologically examines the development of the tourist industry during this period.

### 1. 1945 -1948.

The immediate postwar years experienced a boom in Irish tourism. Both Kennedy and Dowling ( 1975 ), and Gillmor ( 1985 ) agree that the immediate postwar boom was influenced by two specific factors; firstly, a plentiful supply of good food in Ireland in comparison to the UK, where strict rationing was in operation ; and secondly, severe currency restrictions and disruptions to transport and tourist facilities in Europe. Both factors ensured that Ireland was a major attraction for foreigners, and Bray was among the most affected by this trend. According to Flynn ( 1986, p103 ), a huge influx of visitors from

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland spent their annual holiday in Bray during this period. Furthermore this influx changed holiday patterns from their previous prestige

to a miniature Blackpool with boarding houses, ice cream parlours, amusement arcades, one-armed bandits, paddle boats, sticks of rock and singing pubs ( ibid ).

## 2. 1948 - 1957.

However as Kennedy and Dowling ( 1975, p134 ) note ... these factors proved to be temporary and the boom in tourism reached its peak in 1948. Gillmor explains that ...as holiday facilities in Britain improved, Irish export tourism declined ( 1985, p303 ). Similarly domestic tourism may have been undermined by the deceleration and eventual stagnation of the postwar recovery that occurred from 1950 to 1958. Furthermore the development of facilities in Europe and the UK may have attracted Irish tourists to holiday abroad, therefore further damaging domestic tourism.

Kennedy and Dowling (1975, p133 ) point out that during the years 1948 to 1957, the average annual rate of change in net receipts ( i.e. between earnings from visitors to Ireland and expenditure abroad by Irish Holidaymakers ) was - 4.1 percent at current values and -8 percent at constant prices. Therefore, during the period tourists from Ireland increasingly spent more abroad, while earnings from visitors to Ireland decreased.

The magnitude of the decline which took place between 1948 and 1957 may be appreciated from the fact that in 1968 despite the growth from 1957 to 1968, the volume of net tourist receipts was still about 15percent below the 1949 level ( Kennedy and Dowling 1975, p14).

Kennedy and Dowling have argued that: improvements to holiday amenities in Britain and in Europe; increased allowances for foreign travel; and, intensive competition for tourist traffic contributed to the interruption in tourism growth. However, these authors also stress that the decline may not have been so

prolonged or so large had there been a more prompt response in measures to develop the tourist industry. While Kennedy and Dowling acknowledge the beginning of a conscious policy for tourist development in the early fifties, through the formation of two state bodies, they argue that inadequate funding and a lack of experience ensured that these efforts were not successful ( 1975, p143-4 ). Gillmor makes a similar point ( 1985, p305 ) that while the commitment was present in the 1950s it was some time before structures and development policy evolved Kennedy and Dowling push their argument further by quoting Lynch's criticism

there seems to have been a belief that a competitive tourist industry could have established itself spontaneously ( 1969, p195 ).

### 3. 1957 -1969.

Gillmor ( 1985 ), Kennedy and Dowling ( 1975 ) and Deane ( NESc, 1980 ) agree that during this period the Irish tourist industry experienced growth . Deane uses data on export tourism, both the number of visitors to Ireland ( staying more than one night ) and the tourism revenue figures, for each year from 1960 to 1969, to demonstrate this growth pattern ( p56 - 58 ). Kennedy and Dowling base their argument on the calculation of annual rates of change in tourist earnings ( from visitors from abroad ) and expenditure ( of Irish residents taking domestic holidays ) over the years 1957 to 1968 ( p133-4 ).

According to Gillmor the following factors are responsible for tourism growth during these years -

improved economic environment, improvements in tourism administration, development incentive schemes and facilities from the 1950s and the introduction of car ferry services in the 1960s ( 1985, p303 ).

Indeed, there is no doubt about the change in economic fortunes of Ireland during the late fifties and early sixties. O'Hagan and MacStay ( 1981, p21-24 ) point out that the fruits of the new industrial policy: based on foreign

investment and exporting, were experienced during the boom years 1958 to 1973. According to Kennedy and Dowling this improved economic environment contributed directly to ... the rapid growth of real personal income per capita in Ireland from 1958 ( 1975, p144 ). These authors also argue that this rise in prosperity contributed to the growth in domestic tourism at that time. Furthermore, increases to the length of holidays with pay; under The Agricultural Workers ( Holidays ) Act 1950 ( Gov. of Ireland 1951, p481-7 ), and The Holidays ( Employees ) Act 1961 ( Gov. of Ireland 1962, p1103-55 ), complimented the growth of personal income and demonstrated the governments approval that all workers were entitled to and should take, holidays.

Economic expansion during these years may also have contributed to the growth of Aer Lingus, the state sponsored body responsible for development of civil aviation in Ireland. CERT ( 1993) have highlighted the importance of the transatlantic flights from New York and Boston through Shannon, introduced in 1958, to the growth of international tourism to Ireland. Similarly, Gillmor ( 1985, p303 ), Kennedy and Dowling ( 1975, p135 ) and CERT ( 1993, p16-17 ) have highlighted the importance of the introduction of car ferry services in the early 1960s to the growth of tourism during the postwar period.

Finally, Kennedy and Dowling ( 1975 ) and Gillmor ( 1985 ) have highlighted the importance of the development of tourist accommodation and tourist facilities in relation to the tourism growth during these years. Kennedy and Dowling ( 1975, p144 ) have detailed the contribution of Bord Failte Eireann ( the state body responsible for the development and marketing of tourism ) to this growth. They have highlighted the cyclical nature of: Bord Failte Eire's grant scheme, the improved accommodation base and tourist facilities it stimulated; the increased tourist numbers these developments attracted and the increased tourist revenue thus created; which, in turn ensured that the tourism



sector became more attractive for investment, therefore developing and improving further the accommodation and amenity facilities for tourists in Ireland.

#### 4. 1969 - 1979.

The National Economic and Social Council has pointed to; a decrease in the total number of visitors after a peak in 1969; a significant fall in revenue from 1968 to 1972; a decline in the average revenue earned per tourist; and, a decrease in the average length of stay of visitors ( 1980, p5 ). Similarly Gillmor estimated that ... the number of visitors declined by 25 percent in 1969 to 1972 and that ... the revenue in real terms from export tourism ... fell to its 1961 level ( 1985, p303 ). Therefore, after the growth of tourism experienced between 1957 and 1969, the next four years saw a reversal of the previous pattern.

Different opinions have been expressed as to the cause of this interruption. Clark and O'Conneide ( 1981) have pointed to the situation in Northern Ireland to explain the arrested growth of tourism. However, the National Economic and Social Council's report ( no. 52 ) on Tourism Policy refuses to place emphasis solely with the Troubles ( 1980 ).

Gillmor ( in Breathnach 1985 ) agrees that the outbreak of violence in the Northern province did contribute. However, Gillmor argues that a combination of factors contributed to the decline in tourism growth; the Republic of Ireland's diminishing share of World Tourist Arrivals, from 1.9 percent in 1960 to 0.7 percent in 1970; a faster rise in tourist prices compared to other countries resulting in a loss of competitiveness; the more intensive promotional campaigns of other countries' state agencies and tour operators; the diminished emigration trend that developed from the sixties economic boom years, which ensured that fewer emigrants returned on holiday; the negative impact of economic stagnation, during the early seventies, on investment in tourism

development and on domestic tourists personal income; the changes in source markets which resulted in reduced spending by these new visitors; and finally, an increasing number of young Irish single workers travelling abroad on cheaper, more attractive sun holidays.

Fortunately, this pattern was itself arrested and 'recovery' from the tourism depression ... occurred during the remainder of the 1970s ( *ibid*, p1 ). The National Economic and Social Council's report on Tourism Policy ( 1980 ) supports this view by detailing the growth in both, tourist numbers visiting the Republic and the expenditure of visitors, during the period 1972 to 1978.

### **1980 - 1997: TOURISM IN MODERN IRELAND.**

This final section in the history of Irish tourism is divided into three sections. The first section analyses tourist trends during the eighties while the second focuses on the nineties thus far. Both sections use data on tourist arrivals, tourism revenue, employment in tourism and tourist accommodation and facilities to trace the growth pattern during these decades. Explanations are then presented for these patterns. The final section traces changes in modern tourism and their significance to rural communities in Ireland.

Tourism is an industry which has experienced phenomenal worldwide growth in the period since the Second World War ( *Breathnach* 1994, pV ).

The modern world has seen further expansion in tourism worldwide. According to Urry ( 1990, p47 ) the international tourist sector was the second largest item in world trade and had almost 300 million tourist arrivals worldwide by 1984. Furthermore according to Bord Failte ( 1995, p3 ) the World Tourism Organisation ( WTO ) has reported 321 million international tourist arrivals in 1994. Therefore world tourism has experienced unprecedented growth, not only in arrivals but also in revenue, employment and available facilities, during the last two decades. But has the case of Ireland kept pace with international

trends during this period, or has it once again been found lagging behind its foreign counterparts, as previously experienced during the late nineteenth century and the late 60s to early 70s in particular ?

### The Eighties.

As regards the development of tourism in Ireland, the eighties was a decade of two contrasting trends. On the one hand, during the early years 1980 to 1986 tourism was characterised by stagnation, while on the other hand the latter years 1986 to 1990 experienced positive tourism growth, as suggested by respective figures for visitor numbers and tourism employment.

According to Gillmor ( in Breathnach 1994, p1 ), recovery from the tourism depression of the early seventies was in progress during the late seventies. However ... a loss of competitiveness and economic recession produced a further slump in visitor numbers in the early eighties plus a decline in the revenue earned per visitor over the period 1969 -1984 ( ibid ). The situation depreciates more given the fact that between 1960 and 1986 Ireland had been losing its share of international tourism. Gillmor, quoting Deegan and Dineen ( 1993 ), points out that during this period Irelands percentage of : World tourist arrivals fell from 1.98 to 0.75 and, European tourist arrivals fell from 2.74 to 1.117. Thus, not only was the Irish Tourist industry performing badly domestically, but its international performance was also slipping during the early eighties.

However, during the late eighties the performance and importance of the tourist sector in Ireland rose. Firstly, by 1986 external visitor numbers had risen to 27% more than the 1969 figure, and increased by 49% between 1986 and 1992, giving an annual growth rate of 10% in the late eighties, according to Gillmor ( ibid, p3 ). A second indicator is the contribution tourism has made to employment in the eighties. Breathnach ( 1994, p44 ) has calculated that between 1985 and 1990 tourism employment increased by 15,000 or 23%,

which represented over one third of the corresponding national increase during the period.

Different factors have been used in explaining the growth patterns associated with the eighties. Breathnach ( ibid, p41 ) points to the increased emphasis the Irish government placed on tourism, reflecting a similar international trend, as a new source of employment. Gillmor also points to the important role the Irish government has played

in national plans from 1987, much emphasis has been placed on the part which tourism might play in remedying the state's critical employment problems ( in Breathnach 1994, p3 ).

Furthermore, Gillmor ( in Kockel 1993, p19 ) points to: the liberalisation of air transport, 1987- 88; a decline in inflation rates resulting in reduced VAT rates for tourists; and increased return visits by recent emigrants as a result of an early eighties surge in emigration as other factors behind increased growth in tourism during the eighties.

### The Nineties.

The growth pattern inherited from the eighties has continued during the nineties. The only exception being 1991 when expansion slackened due to : the effects on travel caused by the Gulf War; currency exchange rate changes; and economic recession in source countries, according to Gillmor ( in Breathnach 1994, p3 ). Continued growth of the tourist sector during the nineties is evident from the following data on:

1. External Tourist Arrivals. Over the six years 1986 to 1992 the number of external tourists has increased by 49% , while the total number of visitors in 1992 was 88% greater than its corresponding figure for 1969 ( Gillmor ibid ). Bord Failte have calculated that overseas tourist arrivals in Ireland grew by 37% during the period 1991 to 1995, which compares admirably to the European figure of 16% ( 1996, p1 ). Furthermore, 1995 was the fourth

successive year of growth and with 4.2 million visitors their number has more than doubled, up 117%, over the previous ten years ( *ibid* ).

2. Employment. According to Breathnach ( 1994, p43 ) the Department of Tourism, Transport and Communications have estimated that tourism employment accounted for 7.1% of total employment in 1990, which compares favourably with the corresponding figure of 6% for Europe. By 1992 tourism employment, at 90,000 full time equivalents ( FTEs ), accounted for 7.3% of total employment in the state ( Gilmor in Breathnach 1994, p7 ). Again by 1995 this figure had increased to 102,000 or 8.3% of national employment, according to Bord Failte ( 1996b, p9). In the nineties tourism has become an important employment creator in Ireland, being responsible for one third of all jobs created between 1987 and 1995 according to Bord Failte ( 1996a, p8 ).

3. Accommodation and amenities. Gillmor ( in Breathnach 1994, p3 ) argues that the supply of accommodation and other tourist facilities has risen in the early nineties because ... the average tourist throughout per facility has not grown in tandem with the overall growth in tourist numbers. A similar pattern is also highlighted by Bord Failte ( 1996b, p13-8 ) who point to growth of capacity in many sectors of accommodation between 1991 and 1995. For example room capacity has risen in all of the following : paid serviced accommodation by 30% ; in rented accommodation by 75% ; and in the hostel sector by 69%, during the period.

Expansion is also noted in the supply and quality of other tourist facilities ( *ibid*, p75-156 ). For example according to Horner ( in Breathnach 1994, p92 ) between 1990 and 1994, 73 new golf courses, 44 extensions and 35 courses at proposal stage have ensured that, golf capacity in Ireland has increased by 50%.

Increased accommodation capacity, extensions to the range and quality of tourist facilities and amenities to cope with spiraling visitor numbers have

ensured the growth of earnings from tourism. According to Bord Failte ( 1996a, p7 ) total foreign exchange earnings from tourism, including carrier receipts, has grown 38% from 1991 to 1995. Also, the total revenue from tourism, both domestic foreign and carrier receipts, has grown from £1740.6 million in 1992 (Gillmor in Breathnach 1994, p7 ) to £2.3 billion in 1995 ( Bord Failte 1996a, p1 ).

Not surprisingly the growth of tourism revenue and tourism employment increases the economic significance of the tourist sector within the state : According to Gillmor ( in Breathnach 1994, p7 ) in 1992 tourism generated £873 million in tax revenue to the exchequer and the tourist sector accounted for 7.1% of Irelands Gross National Product ( GNP ) - compared to 5.7% in 1985. In 1995, £1,125 million tax revenue and 6.4% of GNP came from tourism, according to Bord Failte ( 1996b, p9 ).

Therefore the nineties have seen the continued expansion of the tourist sector, setting new records for visitor numbers, employment, the supply of accommodation and amenities and for revenue earned form tourists and tax created for the exchequer. Not only do these figures reflect international trends but according to Bord Failte

statistics produced by the World Tourism Organisation show that Irish tourism grew faster than any other European country ( 1996a, p7 ).

Gillmor has argued that a number of factors have been responsible for continued expansion of the tourist sector during the nineties ( in Breathnach 1994, p3-5 ). Firstly, government policy has experienced a sea change as regards its attitude towards the tourist sector. In the nineties the development of the tourist industry is firmly embedded in the development of the Irish economy. The government has played a key role in two developments plans for Irish tourism within the last decade ; the Operational Programme for Tourism 1989 - 1993, and Developing Sustainable Tourism 1994 - 1999, lobbying E C

funding and stimulating private investment, thus providing the financial bedrock. The first of these plans has tackled weaknesses in the quality and range of the tourism product, while the second plan aims to ensure that job creation in the industry is sustainable and that our raw material, the environment, is protected. Secondly, Gillmor has pointed to the liberalisation of air transport which reduced air fares and produced an expansion in air services being particularly beneficial to our tourist industry given Ireland's peripheral location in Europe. Thirdly, Gillmor highlights the decline in inflation rates which effected reduced costs associated with the tourist sector. In 1983 and 1987, 41% of visitors said their Irish holiday was poor value, compared to just 12% in 1992, according to Gillmor ( ibid ). Gillmor also points to an increase in the number of emigrants visiting home, as a result of the increase in emigration from Ireland during the early eighties. Finally Gillmor points to a change in international trends in holidaymaking from 'sun lust' to 'wander lust' holidays benefiting Ireland, which is an ideal destination for the latter. This change is also noted by Bord Fáilte

Since 1990 volume and revenue to the Mediterranean countries have been stagnant, while Northern European destinations have grown apace. Compared to 1994, travel by Europeans grew 37% to Finland, 9% to Sweden, and 7% to Britain, but it declined to all Mediterranean countries except Italy and Spain ( 1996a, p7 ).

#### Continental European tourists and the rural Irish economy.

This section focuses on the connection between what Gillmor termed an international change of preference from 'sun lust' to 'wander lust' destinations and rural Irish communities. The section begins by outlining the nature of these 'wander lust' holidays, and then focuses on attempts to explain the international swing in their favour. Finally the effects of these changes on the Irish tourist industry are examined and in particular, within the context of rural tourism.

Urry ( 1990, p1-2 ) argues that 'the gaze' is a fundamental element of tourism, that when on holiday to look on the different surrounds is part of the motivation for the holiday and for the particular destination. Furthermore Urry has conceptualized two different types of tourist gaze. Firstly the collective gaze which prioritises the presence of other people and the atmosphere created from the gathering. Secondly, the romantic gaze emphasises solitude, privacy and a semi- spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze. Urry points out that objects of the collective gaze include mostly public places, for example towns cities and sea-side resorts. On the other hand, mountains, river valleys and wild coastal regions, areas of undisturbed natural beauty, are objects of the romantic gaze. Urry argues that the motivation for these gazes lies in the intense pleasure anticipated in gazing on the real object. This sense of anticipation is created and sustained in the media, for example in magazines, television, film and postcards. From this description Urry's romantic gaze appears very similar to what Gillmor terms 'wander lust' holidays. Both are located in natural environments, especially in areas of scenic beauty, also most of these tourists come from urban towns and cities and the sense of aloneness or of being at one with nature is important. This modern romanticism is explored by Bell ( 1995 ), who argues that Bord Failte have actively sought to attract particular visitors to Ireland. Bell points to the creation of a romantic discourse for Ireland, through art, photograph and poetical text which appeals to the visual codes and literary sensibilities present in the German middle class roots, that is the Northern Romantic landscape painterly tradition.

Kneafsey ( in Kockel 1993, p104-9 ) also notes changes in international holiday destinations. Kneafsey notes that these new holidays have many interlinked dimensions: they contain activities; where soft and cloudy weather are not a problem; the environment is a precious resource and because rural areas have kept their natural beauty they have become havens of relaxation and



reprieve; and finally the search for unique experiences and activities ensure a cultural dimension. Kneafsey also traces these changes in tourist demands to changes occurring in the transformation from Modern to Postmodern society. For example Kneafsey argues that postmodernism highlights the traditional and fragmentary 'others' in society, a parallel can be seen between this and new tourists' interest in traditional cultures and lifestyles. Kneafsey also points out that supporters of both postmodern changes and this new tourism are largely middle or service class people. Therefore Kneafsey has argued for a postmodern explanation of the changes in international tourism.

Ireland is an ideal location for this type of tourism and thus has benefited directly from changes in international tourist trends, as seen during the nineties. Within the recent growth of the Irish tourist sector changes in certain source markets have been noted. Gillmor ( in Breathnach 1994 ) highlights the growth of mainland European countries, from 3% in 1960 to 35% in 1992, as source markets for Irish tourism. Furthermore these Europeans spend 24% more on holidays in Ireland than any other tourist group, according to Bord Failte ( 1995 ). Higher spending by these Europeans is a result of many characteristics peculiar to the European tourists ( Gillmor in Breathnach 1994 and Bord Failte 1995 ) such as: their longer Irish holiday and their highest use of many forms of paying accommodation, caravans and camping, hostels and rented accommodation. Also, with half of these Europeans between the ages of 19 and 34, activity holidays are a high priority in their holiday, for example cycling, hiking and hill walking.

However the regional significance of these Europeans has become very relevant for rural communities in Ireland. As Kneafsey states new tourists are seen as patrons to local lifestyles and traditional cultures. This is because they are interested in visiting rural areas. For example, from 1990 to 1994 in Ireland, the south-west has been the most common destination with the west being

second among European visitors ( Bord Failte 1995 ). As rural areas have become marginalised through depopulation and unemployment, rural tourism is increasingly seen as a solution to the problem by providing an ancillary source of income. However in reality, rural tourism has not spread evenly to all communities. According to Gillmor ( in Breathnach 1994, p15 ) the geographical distribution of overseas tourism in Ireland is predominantly coastal, especially along the west coast and in Dublin. In fact only a minority of areas have benefited from the spread of rural or cultural tourism, such as Killarney and west Cork in Ireland. On the other hand the majority of rural communities ( with less spectacular scenery ) have been left out, for examples counties like Leitrim Longford and Laois have below average tourist facilities and accommodation which reflect their meager share of the total tourism income in Ireland. For example Horner ( ibid, p93 ) has pointed to sparsity of new golf course developments in the north midlands and north west of Ireland, while Bord Failte ( 1996b, p16 ) demonstrate below average capacity of hotel, hostel and rented accommodation in the Midlands East region. Therefore developing tourism in these regions is most difficult, because the landscape and environment need to be enhanced.

Thus tourism in modern Ireland has experienced unprecedented growth. However initially stagnation and decline was experienced in the early eighties. But by the late eighties and nineties: a more positive government policy on tourism development; the extension of air services; and a more competitive tourism product, have contributed to a boom in Irish tourism. During this period the importance of European visitors to Ireland was highlighted; due to their above average spending and their interest in visiting rural Irish communities. On this point they have been linked to the development of rural tourism, an important factor in stemming the spread of poverty in rural communities. However, in reality the case is quite different with a minority of communities

benefiting from tourism in rural areas while the majority of rural communities find tourism development difficult.

## **CONCLUSION.**

The aim of this Chapter has been to introduce the reader to tourism in Ireland: to highlight trends and to offer explanations for these. It also noted that certain areas ( coastal and scenic landscapes ) in Ireland have a history of tourism, while others ( mainly inland and with less spectacular scenery ) have a much shorter history of tourism. In the first section early tourism in Ireland was analysed. During this period the Anglo-Irish elite dominated coastal resorts and scenic areas, unlike the English experience where 'mass tourism' developed. This feature was related to the lack of Industrialisation in Ireland during this period. This dominance was broken down during the Inter-War years and a new group emerged at the seaside resorts and scenic areas: the Catholic commercial, professional and farming class. However the development of bus transport and the provision of paid holidays for industrial workers in the Free State enabled lower income families to take day trips and weekend excursions to these areas also.

Tourism in Post-War Ireland was characterised by fluctuating trends: initially growth, then stagnation, then growth again but finally decline in the seventies. The initial growth was linked to the post-war disruption of services in Britain and Europe, while the preceding stagnation occurred as these countries re-built their facilities. Economic boom in Ireland during the late fifties and early sixties contributed to the growth in domestic tourism during this period while the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland was a major factor in the tourism slump of the early seventies. Tourism in Modern Ireland has developed into a vital industry, economically. During this period changes in international tourist destination choices have favoured Ireland. The growth of 'rural' or 'cultural

tourism' is perceived to benefit the economically marginalised rural communities in Ireland. In some areas this has been the case while in others this has not occurred. Therefore there is a stark contrast between the experience of tourism in Ireland. Certain regions have a long history of tourism while other less scenic regions have only recently begun to develop their tourism potential. In the following chapter we analyse the growth and significance of rural tourism in Ireland.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

# **RURAL TOURISM AND THE PLANNING OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND.**

Introduction: The aim of this chapter is to highlight the importance of ‘rural tourism’ in modern Ireland. Both the Irish state and the EU argue that rural tourism is a resource that can be harnessed in order to stimulate rural development. The chapter opens with an examination of how ‘rural decline’ occurred in post-war Ireland. The following section focuses on community based responses to rural poverty in the late seventies and early eighties, assessing why these groups were more suited to the provision of essential services than to engaging direct economic activity.

The third section looks at ‘Area based programmes’, initiated by the State and the EU to tackle rural development through participation between state agencies, commercial interests and the locals. Again deficiencies have been highlighted in these programmes. The diversification of economic activities is a central feature of the area based approach. The fourth section analyses the emergence of rural tourism, within this diversified approach, as a viable rural enterprise. Finally in the last section, Ballyhoura Development LTD is taken as a case study of rural development through rural tourism and its outcome is examined.

## **THE ORIGINS OF RURAL DECLINE IN IRELAND.**

A number of factors have been associated with the development of economic and social problems in rural Ireland since the 1950s. Tovey ( 1996, p128 ) points out that supporting and developing farming has been perceived to be identical to supporting and developing rural Ireland until the

mid 1980s. This was made possible by the dominance of 'Productionism' within Irish and EU agricultural development policy. Tovey explains that under the productionist model, economic progress is achieved by increasing levels of farm output through industrialised production methods. The problems that emerged under the productionist model are outlined: access to capital rather than skilled labour was the key to success; the quality of food produced was inferior; there were negative visual and ecological impacts on the rural environment and mounting financial and political pressures on the EU.

A similar argument is made by Walsh ( 1994, p28-58 ), who points to the 'modernisation of agriculture' as the major source of rural problems. Walsh outlines three basic dimensions to this process of agricultural modernisation: intensification, concentration and specialisation. Certain problems are associated with each dimension, for example: over-production and environmental destruction from intensification; polarisation of the farming community arising from concentration; and specialisation which leaves farmers open to over reliance on certain crops. Walsh also points to the influence of factors affecting innovation diffusion and adoption, that produced a spatial pattern of agricultural modernisation in Ireland

characterised by a widening division, between on the one hand a relatively small, commercially orientated and capital intensive modernising sector, and on the other hand a large proportion of farms which are both economically and socially marginalised ( *ibid*, p58 ).

Shorthall ( 1994 ) and Walsh ( 1994 ) have highlighted Irelands entry into the EC as having direct and indirect consequences for rural areas. In a direct fashion, both authors point to the failure of the Common Agricultural Policy ( CAP ), introduced at EC level in order to benefit and sustain the rural community. According to Walsh ( p64 ), the core element of the CAP was to maintain farm incomes through price supports, and during the seventies this

policy was judged to be a success. Yet according to Shorthall ( p239 ) and Walsh ( p66- 7 ) numerous problems became apparent during the eighties in relation to the CAP: over production, huge financial cost to the EC budget, environmental destruction, international tensions between the EC and the US at GATT negotiations (Uruguay Round ) and inequality emerging within the farming community, that forced a reform of the CAP. Indirectly , EC membership has ensured that Irish development and regional policy take its lead from the EC ( Shortall 1994, p239 ). Shortall argues that a decline in regional policy at national level since the eighties has contributed to increased marginalisation in rural areas, highlighting the case of the European Regional Development Fund ( ERDF ). According to Shortall even though this fund was initiated in order to assist regional development and Ireland as a whole qualified for funding ... this did not necessarily mean that it trickled down to the regions within Ireland ( p240 ).

Both NESAC ( 1994 ) and Shortall ( 1994 ) acknowledge that problems in rural areas must be understood in a wider context than agricultural development policy alone. Shortall points to the industrial policy during the sixties and seventies being favourable towards rural areas. During this period the Irish government abandoned its protectionist policy in favour of free trade in an attempt to stimulate economic rejuvenation. The cornerstone of this new economic policy was an industrial policy based on exporting and foreign investment. Shortall highlights that this new policy confronted rural decline by dispersing new industries across the regions ( p236-7 ). Unfortunately these new industries consisted mainly of simple self contained operations that did little to stimulate indigenous industry. Furthermore, foreign investment declined in the early eighties' world recession and rural areas were worst affected, especially when the growth of service industries was concentrated in urban areas.

Similarly, the NESCS point to other restructuring forces, such as the growth of certain industries and services, partly determined by industrial policy and also by international economic integration, as having direct and indirect effects on rural areas ( 1994, p42-5 ).

In this section, economic and social problems experienced in rural Ireland have been associated with the modernisation of agriculture, the failure of the CAP, the lack of any concrete regional policy at national level since the seventies and other restructuring forces in industrial development, the service sector and international production. Thus according to Walsh

the importance of off farm employment or other sources of non-agricultural income for example in farm tourism, is increasingly a critical component in the survival strategy of rural farm households ( 1994, p93 ).

### **COMMUNITY BASED RESPONSES.**

Having highlighted the origins of rural decline in Ireland since the fifties, this section proposes to look at how community based initiatives tackled these economic and social problems. Curtin and Varley ( 1991, p107 ) have noted that these community based groups were accepted in official discourse despite the fact that they received only minimal monetary support from the government. Such support may be linked to earlier attempts, outlined by Curtin and Varley ( 1991, p99 ) and Shortall ( 1994, p234-5 ), at stimulating local initiative during the fifties and sixties in Africa by Britain and in Asia, Africa and Latin America through US and UN collaboration. According to Shortall, Varley ( 1988 ) has noted three objectives of such community development programmes: improving living conditions for the whole community; ensuring that the initiative comes from the locals; and achieving the widest local participation possible in the development process. However problems associated with participation, control and power developed,



according to Shortall, which led to the abandonment of this approach to development.

According to Curtin and Varley ( 1991) while a similar populist type ideology did reach Ireland around this time, its support never attained a majority. Subsequently until the eighties while

ideological commitment to populism was one thing, the implementation of populist policies proved to be quite another ( *ibid*, p100 ).

But the severity of unemployment during the eighties forced the government to at least lend credence to a number of community based development initiatives, even if monetary support was not forthcoming.

The following are the most prominent examples of such community based development initiatives in Ireland.

Muintir na Tire ( or People of the Countryside ) is a national umbrella organisation for numerous community councils. According to Curtin and Varley ( 1991, p107 ) the strength of these community councils lies in organising and lobbying for the provision of infrastructural services, such as piped water and electricity, improved social services and recreational facilities. However a weakness of community councils was engaging direct economic activity, due mainly to: the voluntary nature of its members; a lack of capital; and a difficulty in achieving community consensus arising from possible competition with private enterprise in the locality, according to Varley ( 1991, p87-8 ). Furthermore, Varley points out that cutbacks in grant aid to Muintir na Tire in 1987 severely restricted the ability of the national organisation to service and represent its affiliated councils. Finally, according to Curtin and Varley ( 1991, p108 ), a refusal to reform local government and the inability to compete with state agencies, in servicing the needs of enterprise groups, have resulted in the decline of Muintir na Tire activity during the late eighties.

Community Co-operatives according to Varley ( 1991, p89 ), are involved in the provision of: essential services; community facilities such as community halls and centres; and commercial enterprise. Curtin and Varley ( 1991, p108 ) note that community development co-operatives in the Gaeltacht area have rejected as inadequate the strategy of the Gaeltacht Development Agency, who are engaged in attracting inward investment in manufacturing. Instead, the Gaeltacht community co-operatives share a desire to use indigenous cultural and natural resources in developing tourism and fishing projects. Yet community co-operatives in the Gaeltacht have achieved only minimal success, according to Curtin and Varley ( *ibid* ). Their poor performance has been related to both internal problems : local apathy; inadequate capital resources; and poor planning and managerial ability, but also to external problems: the nature of state assistance; and tensions between social and commercial activities within the locality. Notably, the government has been the focus of much criticism, from Varley ( 1991) and Breathnach ( 1986 ), concerning its inadequate support for these community development groups. Indeed this argument is strengthened by a comparison between the Irish case and the Scottish example, where a wide ranging package of supports including business and co-operative training, accounting and marketing advice as well as adequate capital are provided to the Highland community co-operatives.

While community councils and community co-operatives have been associated mainly with providing services and facilities, Community Enterprise groups have attempted to engage economic activity directly, by setting up business themselves, and indirectly by inducing, servicing and facilitating private companies ( Varley 1991, p92 ). However according to Curtin and Varley ( 1991, p109 ), jobs created through community enterprise groups in the Mid-West region bear all the hallmarks of the

secondary labour market. Moreover O’Cinneide and Keane ( 1987, p5 ) argue that state officials are more comfortable dealing with private enterprise than community enterprise groups. Curtin and Varley ( 1991 ) conclude that community enterprise thus far is not a viable method of tackling the unemployment problem in rural areas effectively.

Finally Varley ( 1991, p100-7 ) has highlighted a number of features that have handicapped these community based initiatives during the late seventies and early eighties. For example: these local initiatives are anything but a homogenous set, consisting of diverse aims, approaches and organisational structures; and while participation was a key objective in their strategy, in reality local numbers involved were very low; and finally their commercial activities were at most only in marginal demand and long term state subvention was required to sustain these ventures. In light of these problems, Varley argues that indirect involvement, through the provision of facilities and services to the community, in economic activity is a more realistic objective for community based groups. This opinion is also held by Commins

they have made little impact on the critical rural problems of unemployment and low incomes ( in Murray & Greer eds 1993, p45 ).

## **RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AREA BASED PROGRAMMES.**

While community groups were primarily responsible for development initiatives in the late seventies and early eighties, albeit with official acceptance but little financial support, this section focuses on the development initiatives of the late eighties and nineties. ‘Area based programmes’ emerged primarily from the government and the EC. According to Commins ( 1993 ) and Varley ( 1991, p96 ) the principal common features of these projects are: participation by locals in planning and implementing the development ideas; partnership from above between

the state and local actors on the basis of sharing responsibility and resources; and a multi-sectoral approach to integrated development. Varley also highlights the importance of time in the operation of these programmes, where both the state and EC highlight the time restriction in order to concentrate minds and - jolt the economy into motion - in the hope of achieving sufficient momentum to sustain themselves. The most distinguishing feature of these EC led programmes is the lucrative funds available to these projects for training, education and capital investment in new community enterprise projects.

According to Walsh ( 1994, p110 ) and Commins ( 1993, p46 ), the impetus behind these state and EC sponsored bottom-up approaches to rural development were threefold. Firstly, the reform of the CAP included the EC seeking new methods of farm support to sustain rural economies. CAP Reform also identified diversification and a more comprehensive approach to development, as the means of achieving rural independence. Secondly, fearing that the establishment of the Single European Market would only consolidate problems in lagging regions in time, EC Structural Funds were earmarked to regions in need, to foster economic and social cohesion. Thirdly, EC efforts to combat poverty shifted focus, from an attempt to manage poverty to the adoption of integrated development strategies for rural localities. Yet each of these factors is related to the attempt to halt rural decline and foster economic and social development in rural areas. This section focuses on the most prominent bottom-up approaches to rural development.

The Pilot Integrated Rural Development Programme ( Pilot IRDP ) initiated by the Department of Agriculture and Food, was carried out in twelve regions across Ireland. The most significant objectives included: improving employment opportunities, earning potential, quality of life and community

identity in rural areas. Such objectives were to be achieved through a bottom-up approach to development, that is through mobilising local people to decide their own priorities and bring them to reality in conjunction with a planning team of civil servants and private interests, all under the supervision, but not direction, of a rural development co-ordinator. The establishment of a core group ( of eight ) was the first task, composed of people with the necessary commitment, a variety of experience and sensitivity to existing community or development organisations. This programme highlighted the concept of 'shared learning' through the workshops of core groups , co-ordinators and the planning team, and on another level individual core members interacting with each other and through the monthly meetings of co-ordinators. Also each pilot area was twinned for regular meetings, which was revised later in the programme and became a network arrangement. The core groups identified and selected a number of specific projects which would advance the overall aims of the programme, to further economic and social development of the area. Thus the core groups were additional and complementary to local groups activities and acted as catalysts rather than promoters.

According to O'Malley ( ESRI 1992, no.27 ) the programmes created significant employment and income during the pilot period. O'Malley also praised the operation of the programme, based on a small number of paid employees mobilising such a large voluntary effort. Yet the role of the state in encouraging and assisting this development was also acknowledged. O'Malley argues that this programme made it possible to do things that would have been unlikely to happen relying on individuals in isolation ( 1992, p9 ).

Finally, according to Shortall( 1994, 242 ) and Walsh( 1994, p13 ) the programme was extended for a further two years after some debate.

Unfortunately, it took a new form that omitted the planning teams, training and workshop seminars, that is the local input. Moreover, with funding coming from the EC Operational Programme for Rural Development, selected measures and not an area based approach to development dominated, thus narrowing the original parameters of the Pilot IRDP.

The LEADER Programme ( 1991- 1994 ) is an EC initiative that seeks to stimulate a bottom -up approach to rural development. This initiative has five main features: one, to establish economic and social development in rural areas according to local needs while making use of local resources; two, these innovative solutions should serve as a model for all rural areas and ensure maximum integration between sectoral measures; three, this programmes consists of rural development groups ( representing farmers organisations, co-operatives, local authorities, state agencies and the local community ) compiling development plans. If these plans are accepted under the LEADER, the EC and the state provides fifty percent of the funds while the development group must match this fund. Of a total of 200 groups chosen across the EC 16 of these were from Ireland; four, according to Shortall ( 1994, p243 ), these groups enjoyed flexibility in implementing their plans; and five, these groups operated on a network basis, exchanging experiences, ideas and information.

According to Walsh ( 1994, p138 ) the LEADER programme emphasised the involvement of locals in all stages of the development process as fully as possible. Walsh also notes that as LEADER is intended to operate in geographically large areas, in populations between five and ten thousand, it was necessary in some cases in Ireland for separate localities to come together to form larger groups ( p143 ). However the 16 groups in Ireland range from small units like Inishowen and Eris, to whole counties like Tipperary, Wexford, Wicklow and Clare to a regional unit encompassing

Cavan and Monaghan. Walsh also notes the variety of partnerships that emerged under the LEADER programme ( p144 ) and how the group developed from different forms ranging from pre-existing development groups ( Ballyhoura ) to local authorities ( Offaly ) to co-operatives ( Barrow-Nore-Sure ).

LEADER: Success or Failure. Drawing on data gathered by Kearney Boyle and Walsh ( 1994 ), the NESC 1994 ( no. 97, p79-81 ) reports that the claimed employment impact from LEADER was 1,445 full time job equivalents. However this figure is subject to certain problems: relating to data collection, deadweight ( the extent to which the project may have happened anyway ), and displacement ( the extent to which the project replaces existing activity ). However the NESC also reports that

a significant number of groups also report a relatively large proportion of those employed being previously unemployed ( ibid p79 ).

In assessing the significance of LEADER the NESC has attempted to identify what it has contributed apart from grants. Community involvement, partnerships between local groups, state agencies and the private sector within a multi sectoral approach to development have been the main advantages associated with LEADER. Yet the NESC report highlights problems with the partnership process, the fifty percent self funding requirement and the imposition of a multi-sectoral approach. In the last case, for example, certain areas may hold an advantage in terms of their natural resources or their enterprise history, in such cases a single sectoral approach to development may be more logical for the area.

Forum, the North and West Connemara Rural Project Ltd. ( 1990-1994 ) is the only Irish rural project under the 3rd EC Poverty Programme. The aim of this project is to foster economic and social integration of the most

marginalised groups ( NESC 1994, p100 ), through voluntary and statutory co-operation ( Varley 1991, p97 ). According to Shortall ( 1994, p243-4 ) the project is co-financed by the EC and the Irish state, it has a formal company structure and while it is not part of the broader set of rural development initiatives the project provides an inflow of funds and enterprise into areas. Varley has highlighted the fact that the programme at an early stage was focused on providing a range of important services, from education to elderly health care to community and co-operative enterprise assistance.

While the NESC ( *ibid* ) consultants considered this project the most advanced attempt to date to incorporate the main concepts of integrated rural development ( p101 )

they also argued that the Forum experience highlighted major organisational and procedural difficulties for rural development initiatives. For example, within the partnerships there is an important power and resource imbalance, that is between the statutory agencies and the community groups, and also the need for co-ordination across policies and agencies at both local and central levels.

However, these three programmes are only part of a larger body of projects, funds and organisations pursuing rural development in Ireland. For example see NESC 1994 ( p65-112 ) for information on County Enterprise Boards ( CEBs ), the Global Grant for Local Development, the PESP Partnership and the Operational Programme for Rural Development 1989-1993.

Summary: Thus far we have seen how rural decline occurred in Ireland during recent decades. From the literature three principal factors were highlighted in contributing to rural decline. Firstly, the evolution of



productionism or the modernisation of agriculture produced a polarized farming community in rural Ireland, consisting of a minority of large commercial farms and a majority of small farms that were no longer viable. Secondly, Irish entry into the EC has directly, through the adoption of the EC's CAP, and indirectly, with the Irish government not adopting any regional or development policy initially, contributed to rural decline. Thirdly, an industrial policy based on exporting and foreign investment dispersed through the countryside has only produced low skilled labour and low paid employment, doing little to stimulate indigenous industry. Moreover world recession in the early eighties caused many of these foreign owned branch plants to close down operations in peripheral regions. Further difficulties were caused with the location of a growing service sector in urban regions.

From this scenario, an attempt at development, experienced during the fifties and sixties in Third World countries, known as community development, emerged in rural Ireland. Many of these local groups, for example community councils and community co-operatives, concentrated on providing essential services to the locality. Others, for example community enterprise groups, attempted to stimulate economic activity, directly or indirectly. However certain problems : poor participation; a lack of homogeneity in organisation and aims; the lack of adequate capital resources, and the marginal nature of demand for their economic activities, have hampered the optimal success of these community based initiatives.

During the late eighties and nineties a number of community development programmes, initiated at central level but depending on local participation in partnership with state agencies and private business interests, emerged. Although these area based programmes have a time restriction they also carry attractive capital funding. Crucially however, these programmes represented a mediation between the government, the local community and

commercial interests, as the best way to stimulate the rural economy and preserve rural society, albeit within pre-determined and time restricted parameters.

Within this new agenda for rural development, based on local participation in partnership with other interests and integration, the multi-sectoral ( or diversified ) approach is highlighted. The lessons of the single sectoral approach, that is rural development through agricultural development alone, seem to have been learned. However Tovey ( 1993, p132 ) points out that this shift, from a single to a multi- sectoral approach, in rural development policy is not solely the product of new thinking among social, economic and policy analysts. Tovey highlights an argument by Marsden et al ( 1993 ) : that economic recession during the early eighties forced large capital holders to look elsewhere for profit. Many places and spaces were re-assessed, that were previously conceived as unprofitable. Among these were rural areas, where investors noted consumption goods such as the natural, clean and beautiful environment. Not surprisingly, with changes in international destination choices away from sun splashed coastal resorts, rural areas have become increasingly attractive to investors as well. Within this 'area based approach' to rural development rural tourism has emerged as a leading vehicle for rural regeneration. According to Keane ( in Murray and Greer 1993, p113 ), in five of the sixteen LEADER groups in Ireland, tourism plans account for almost fifty percent of their allocated funds.

## **RURAL TOURISM.**

In this section the rural tourism 'product' is examined, outlining the principal advantages and disadvantages associated with rural tourism. Walsh ( 1994, p152 ) has highlighted a recent shift from accommodation provision in rural areas to the realization that ..rural tourism is a marketable quantity in itself.

Walsh links this transition to: the growing disenchantment with package holidays; a growing awareness of the health hazards of sunbathing; and an increasing interest in activity and adventure based holidays. Keane and Quinn ( 1991, p9), Bord Failte ( 1994, p3) and Walsh ( 1994 ) have emphasised the emergence of a commodity approach to rural tourism. They note that rural tourism is not just about touring rural areas, but

they are holidays which emphasise the receiving areas' natural cultural and craft resources, which offer water based and land based leisure activities which provide opportunities for learning new skills, studying flora/fauna, heritage and archeology, and which encourages a holiday spirit through entertainments and other services ( 1991, p9 ).

Advantages of rural tourism: Civil servants and academics have identified a number of advantages of rural tourism. According to Walsh ( 1994, p153-4 ) many peripheral regions have maintained their original culture, archeological and historical sites. These are factors which increase the attractiveness of areas, through their originality and distinctiveness, for tourists. Walsh also notes that each area has the ability to produce a different rural tourism product, due to each area's unique natural and cultural history. This distinction is achieved by choosing a particular theme apt to the area, which will be used in marketing the areas rural tourism product. Furthermore, Walsh also notes that rural tourism strengthens the social fabric of a community, by stimulating interest in their shared heritage. The community is also enriched through interchange with other cultures, according to Walsh.

Tovey ( 1993, p157-8 ) has highlighted three additional advantages associated with rural tourism. Firstly, Tovey echoes a point made by O'Connor ( 1993, p82 ), that a change in international destination preferences favours Ireland's image of a clean, natural and beautiful country. In this light the rural tourism product has potential. Secondly, rural tourism

has the ability to tackle underdevelopment and poverty in rural Ireland, employment and income will be generated from the tourist's demand for services. Thirdly, Tovey points out that rural tourism, also known as 'soft' or 'green' tourism, according to civil servants is environmentally friendly.

According to Keane and Quinn ( 1991, p31 ), rural tourism projects in France and Austria involve not just the farming households but the whole rural community. Keane and Quinn ( p33 ) also highlight Convery's( 1989 ) point that in the context of rural development, rural tourism has an edge over natural resources, because it is not quite as susceptible to technology displacing labour as for example forestry and aquaculture are.

Keane and Quinn ( 1991, p31 ) and Walsh ( 1994, p100-1 ), support a community based approach to rural tourism. They argue that economic benefits remain within the community and that local sensitivities are respected. However they also point out that state agencies must provide the initial impetus with education, training and adequate capital support.

Problems for rural tourism: A range of concerns and problems have also emerged in relation to rural tourism. Firstly, Tovey ( 1993, p158 ) and Keane and Quinn ( 1991, p85 ) have both highlighted the retarded nature of state support for the rural tourism product initially. In comparison to other European countries, Bord Failte has been slow to adopt 'rural tourism', with the result that at present our product competes with more experienced rural tourism products on the continent.

Secondly the question of who exactly benefits from rural tourism has been raised. Keane and Quinn ( 1991, p199 ) have noted that within official state discourse rural tourism is said to benefit rural development and the livelihoods of those locals. However this view is not completely supported by academics. Keane and Quin's own study, of the Ballyhoura Failte

project, identified a large number of small farmers participating in the programme. However, three quarters of all participants in the programme reported that only five percent of their total income came from tourism. Byrne et al ( 1993 ) have also questioned the ability of rural tourism projects to benefit those most in need. In their study in North West Connemara, of 121 households surveyed only 21 were involved in tourism. Of the 21, only 8 were able to set up their own venture while 13 worked on a part-time seasonal basis in tourism. According to Byrne et al

it seems more realistic to assume that additional income earned in this manner is a haphazard benefit of tourism ( p246 ),

and moreover

a regular source of earned income may be a prerequisite for poor households setting up their own business ( p248 ).

Thirdly, the sustainability of rural tourism, which is promoted strongly by Bord Failte, may be questioned. Tovey ( 1993, p163 ) has highlighted Urry's challenge that tourism can never claim to be completely environmentally friendly considering: the enormous amount of travel to and from holiday destinations each year; and the construction of attractions and amenities for tourists in rural areas. In Ireland there has been considerable local resentment aroused over the construction of interpretive centres in Mullaghmore and in the Burren. Bord Failte have also highlighted the significance of creating sustainable enterprise and employment in rural areas. However the ability of rural tourism programmes to create long term employment for the rural community has so far been rejected by Byrne et al ( 1993 ).

Finally, academics have argued that rural tourism also raised cultural questions, especially concerning identity. Byrne et al ( *ibid*, p154 ) disagrees with the assumption that rural tourism does not affect the locals cultural identity. They argue that the presence of tourists in rural regions inevitably

transforms the locals into the 'modern' and 'industrial' world physically and mentally. For example according to Byrne et al, in many cases local areas display an 'expected authenticity' rather than the actual natural and cultural heritage of the area. This expected heritage displaces the real heritage but also questions the validity of local identity. Similarly Bell ( 1993 ) and Slater ( 1993 ) have identified transformations in the landscape which have more to do with tourist expectations than local representation.

In this section the transition from providing meals and accommodation in rural areas to the development of the 'rural tourism product' in Ireland was highlighted. While Bord Failte was initially slow to accept the viability of rural tourism in the eighties, the situation has changed in the nineties. Rural tourism is at present not only part of the Bord Failte's development plan for tourism, but the government and the EC also sees rural tourism as a key factor in regenerating the rural economy and sustaining rural society. In their promotion of rural tourism the state points out that these programmes will benefit the locals, by increasing jobs and incomes, while at the same time being environmentally sensitive. However critical problems have been highlighted by academic research, concerning: who actually benefits from rural tourism; tourism's ability to be completely environmentally friendly; and the impact of tourists on rural lifestyles and traditions.

#### **CASE STUDY: BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT LTD.**

This section focuses on a practical example of the area based approach to rural development. The particular case chosen, Ballyhoura Development Ltd. has been widely commented upon by the state and by academics in the literature : Keane and Quinn ( 1990 ), Fox ( in Feehan 1992 ), Bord Failte

( 1994 ), Walsh ( 1994 ) and McGowan ( in Powell ed. 1995 ). However Ballyhoura is also chosen because 'rural tourism' is, at least perceived to be, instrumental in the drive for economic and social rejuvenation in the area.

About the area: Ballyhoura, located in the province of Munster, encompasses parts of three counties: Limerick, Cork and Tipperary. According to Fox ( 1992, p83-5 ) and Walsh ( 1994, p165 ) the area is indicative of many rural areas in Ireland. More precisely, although Ballyhoura contains considerable natural beauty it also suffers from rural decline: decreasing farm incomes; out migration and village dereliction. Moreover despite .. a history of community and statutory participation in development .. rural decline still continues ( Fox 1992, p85 ).

History: Ballyhoura Failte Society, a community based tourism co-operative, was formed in 1986 by four local accommodation providers, two farmers and Kilfinane Education Centre, and represented three local parishes. Their objective was simple, to realise the tourism potential of the area through community co-operation and planning, according to McGowan ( 1995, p65 ). A lack of capital, resources and expertise, according to Keane and Quinn ( 1990, p58-9 ), rendered this co-operative unsuccessful. However it later reformed into a wider group interested in the development of the region. A sub committee, representing community groups and state agencies, the Ballyhoura Development Board prepared an integrated rural development plan for 1988 to 1993. However, McGowan ( 1995, p65 ) notes that increasing tourism revenue remained the main objective, with plans in other sectors that enhanced tourism potential given priority. Moreover, the production of the plan itself achieved immediate results according to Fox ( 1992, p85-7 ): with the Training and Employment Authority ( FAS ) funding a new full time manager ; with county Limerick Vocational Educational Committee ( VEC ) providing office space in the

Kilfinane Education Centre; and the production of a resource audit of the area highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the area for potential tourism development.

On the strength of these developments Ballyhoura Failte Society was selected as one of four groups for the Community Agri- Tourism Pilot Project 1989, initiated by Bord Failte, Teagasc ( the State Agricultural and Food Advisory Service ), Macra na Feirme and The Irish Farmers Association ( IFA ), that marketed Irish Country Holidays on the German market. According to Keane and Quinn ( 1990, p52-3 ), the most significant outcome of this project for Ballyhoura Failte was the close partnership forged with state agencies such as Bord Failte, Teagasc and CERT ( the State Training, Education and Recruitment Agency for Tourism ).

In the meantime Ballyhoura Failte Society enlarged from three to forty-five communities, according to McGowan ( 1995, p67-8 ). Also, many aspects of the tourism product were enhanced while a more concerted effort at marketing in Europe was also undertaken, resulting in an increase of £900,000 in tourism revenue by 1991 according to McGowan.

Ballyhoura Development LTD was formed from Ballyhoura Failte Society along with representatives from the state agencies, community groups, Golden Vale Plc and Dairygold Co-operative Society, in order to submit an integrated development plan to the EC LEADER programme. This plan, embracing tourism, education and training, town and village renewal, small and medium sized enterprises and agriculture and forestry, was accepted by LEADER in 1991 and received £1.5 million in funding from the EC. According to McGowan ( 1995, p69 ) the LEADER 1 programme in Ballyhoura has been successful: tourism revenue increased from £900,000 in 1991 to £1.8million in 1994; 181 people received supplementary income; the number of approved beds grew from 189 to 574; maps, signposting and



visitor information were improved; the Kilfinane Education Centre received major infrastructural investment; and 1,000 miles of walking trail was developed.

Rural Tourism as a panacea for rural decline ? Thus far it has been noted that Ballyhoura had much in common with most rural areas in Ireland, especially the contrast between a clean and beautiful landscape and a stagnated rural economy and society. However the perseverance of local community involvement, partnership with state agencies and the development of an integrated development plan for LEADER have conspired to bring rejuvenation to Ballyhoura. Walsh ( 1994, p165-8 ) and McGowan ( 1995, p70 ) have highlighted the importance of community involvement, the integrated approach and education and training to Ballyhoura's success. Fox ( 1992, p86-92 ) points to the significance of funding, the identification, packaging and marketing of the tourism product, the development of infrastructure and private investment as essential elements in the success of Ballyhoura.

However, as previously noted Byrne et al ( 1993 ) have questioned the ability of rural tourism to reach the poorest households and thus arrest rural decline in Connemara. In Ballyhoura according to Fox ( 1992, p92 ) tourism in the main will only supplement income. Similarly, McGowan ( 1995, p70-1 ) argues that tourism alone has not and will not succeed in developing rural areas by itself, in Ballyhoura McGowan reports that rural tourism's contribution to the local economy has increased from 0.4 percent in 1986 to only 3 percent in 1994, despite all the state and EC supports. McGowan concludes that rural tourism is more suited to act as a catalyst for community based integrated development.

## **CONCLUSION.**

The aim of this chapter from the outset has been to appreciate how rural tourism has become increasingly important. The state, the EC and local communities identify rural tourism as a very significant player in rural economic and social regeneration. This chapter began by identifying the origins of rural decline in Ireland: the dominance of agriculture in rural development policy; Irish entry into the EC and the effects of Industrial policy on rural areas. The next section explored a number of community based responses that tackled rural decline, namely: community councils, community co-operatives and community enterprise groups. A number of problems were identified which undermined their ability to make a significant impact on rural decline: a lack of adequate capital and training resources; a lack of homogeneity in the group members approaches and objectives; and minimal local participation by locals.

In the eighties and nineties a new range of programmes emerged from the EC and the Irish state that required the participation of locals in partnership with state agencies and representatives of private business in order to draft and implement plans for rural regeneration. A number of criticisms have also been leveled on these attempts: most notably that no substantial re-organisation of resources and structures of power have accompanied the programmes; and that marginal commercial ventures cannot expect to survive in the market economy. It is within these area based programmes that the rural tourism product is promoted on the basis that it can help regenerate rural economies and societies without damaging the natural environment or the local culture. However, academic research has questioned the ability of rural tourism to achieve its fundamental objectives: sustainable rural development. Finally in a brief analysis of a case study:

Ballyhoura Development LTD, it was discovered that rural tourism alone is not the solution to rural problems, but rather it is only part of a broader integrated plan, encompassing many sectors, necessary to tackle rural decline in Ireland. It has been suggested that rural tourism may act as a catalyst for this more integrated multi- sectoral approach to rural development.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INVESTIGATING TOURISM IN LAOIS.**

Introduction: This chapter explains what this thesis is about, how it was researched and why it was done this way.

#### **BACKGROUND.**

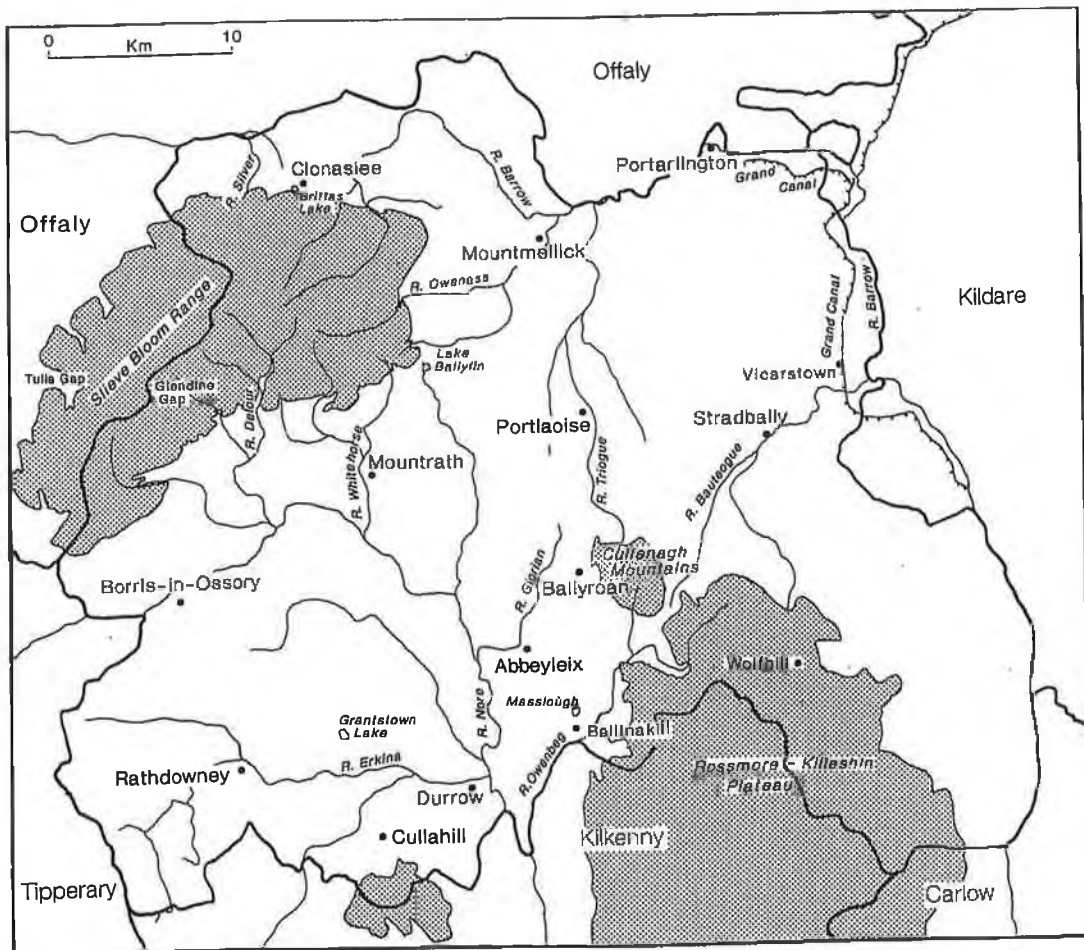
This thesis is a sociological study of local tourism development in Ireland. So far, the review of literature has described the history of tourism development in Ireland. This chronology has highlighted how early tourism revolved around seaside resorts and picturesque landscapes. The lack of industrialisation has been identified as a major factor in the late appearance of the lower class at such tourist destinations. The democratisation of travel and industrial growth during the post-war years have ensured that tourism has become a significant contributor to the Irish economy today. However the spread of tourism development in Ireland has been geographically uneven. Certain areas have generated a vibrant tourism sector, for example Kerry and Galway, while others have been slow to realise the potential for tourism in their areas, for example county Laois. The review of literature also highlighted the importance of tourism in rural development plans. Both the state and the EU have encouraged the development of 'rural tourism' as a viable economic strategy for rural development. Again however certain areas have been quicker than others to take advantage of the funding available in such rural regeneration programmes. Through a combination of local effort and state assistance tourism development is underway in Laois.

Laois: [ *see map5.1 and 5.2* ] is a midland county in Ireland, bordering counties Kilkenny, Tipperary, Offaly, Kildare and Carlow, it is the only county

**Map 5.1**  
Ireland: county divisions. County Laois is highlighted in black.



**Map 5.2**  
County Laois: Physical and Urban features.



that touches a county that does not itself touch the sea. The county covers 171,954 hectares and the main towns are Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Stradbally, Mountrath, Portarlinton, Abbeyleix and Rathdowney. The landscape of Laois may be divided into three regions ( see Convery and Flanagan 1992, p12 and Feehan 1983 ): The Castlecomer Plateau to the southeast rises to an elevation of 330 metres and is capped by sandstone. To the east and north east of the Heath, a 460 acre expanse of geological and archeological significance, lie a series of low undulating hills - three of which, Dunamaise, Clopook and Luggacurran are iron-age forts. Finally, northwest Laois is dominated by the Slieve Bloom Mountains, while only 609 metres high, are desolate enough to give the taste of real wilderness. The Barrow and The Nore, the two principal rivers, drain the county.

This thesis focuses on tourism development in county Laois, an area that has traditionally experienced only a passing tourist trade which generated negligible revenue. Fundamentally, tourism development in Laois faces two major difficulties. Firstly, Laois suffers from a negative image, from both outside the county and from the locals themselves. Visitors and passers-by in the past have associated Portlaoise with its Jail and Mental hospital, while other main towns, Mountmellick, Mountrath and Portarlinton, similarly had little tourist infrastructure. Thus Laois was not noted as a place worth visiting. Moreover this perception would also have been common among Laois people themselves, who were largely unaware of the depth and significance of their heritage. Secondly, as the county lacked any history of tourism a shortage of tourism entrepreneurs, tourism infrastructure- accommodations, attractions and activities, and tourism development experience existed.

However such problems have been tackled by a group of locals interested in developing tourism potential in the county. This voluntary group consisted of representatives from local bodies such as the County Council ( local authority ),

the Traders Association, the Slieve Bloom Development Committee and the local Arts and Heritage groups, but also of local private interests in tourism, mainly accommodation providers, publicans and resteranteurs. Other assistance and advice came from Midlands-East Regional Tourism Organisation ( MERTO ), Teagasc ( the Agricultural Advisory Board ) and more recently Laois LEADER Rural Development Company Ltd. The combined efforts of these groups under the stewardship of Laois Tourism Association has resulted in significant tourism development [ *see map 5.3* ]. It is this 'tourism development' that this thesis focuses on.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.**

Tourism development in Laois has been researched for this thesis in three ways. One, through an analysis of secondary literature pertaining to tourism development in the county. According to Stewart and Kamins ( 1993, p1 )

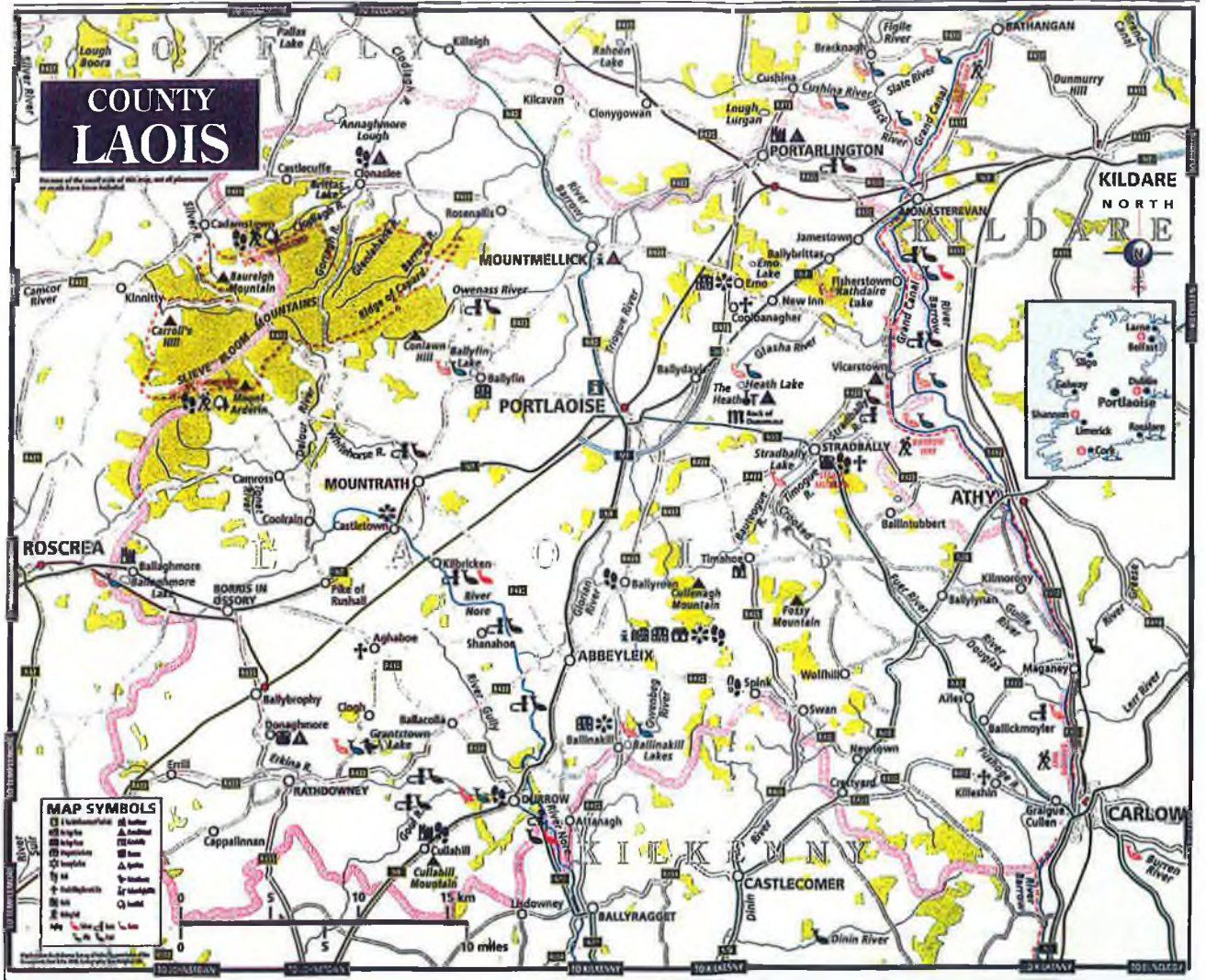
secondary information consists of sources of data and other information collected by others and archived in some form. These sources include government reports, industry studies, archived data sets, and syndicated information services as well as the traditional books and journals found in libraries.

The main advantages of secondary literature are: one, it may be accessed relatively quickly and inexpensively, two, it may act as a useful comparative tool for ones own research, and three, it provides expert opinions.

Unfortunately only one published piece on the topic exists: Tourism in Co. Laois - A Development Strategy ( Convery and Flanagan 1992 ).

The second research method involved the analysis of primary data on the topic: such as the Minutebook of Laois Tourism Associations monthly meetings and the current brochures and promotional pamphlets that publicise Laois's tourist attractions, activities and infrastructure. However these research

Map 5.3  
Tourist attractions and activities in Laois.





methods did not provide enough information and a third research method was employed.

The third method consisted of interviewing five people closely involved in tourism development in Laois. The advantages of interviews have been widely expressed. According to Bell ( 1983, p91 ) the interviewer may ...follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings. In this way the interview ... can provide information that a written response would conceal. According to Babbie, interviews have a higher response rate; may achieve a completion rate of at least eighty to eighty-five percent; decrease the number of 'don't know' and 'no' answers; and provide a guard against confusion, that may arise using questionnaires ( 1990, p187-8 ). Judd et al point out that interviewing: controls the order of the questions; the context of the interview and may allow a rapport to be established, which may motivate the respondent to answer fully and accurately ( 1991, p218 ).

The most important advantage of interviews is in data quality (ibid ).

It was decided that structured interviews with open-ended questions would be an appropriate interviewing technique, especially since the sample would be small. As the interviewees were involved in tourism development in Laois their eagerness and willingness to communicate their efforts would also suit this technique.

The Sample: the following are the main categories of groups involved in the development of tourism in Laois -

- \* local voluntary group: Laois Tourism Association.
- \* state tourism agency: MERTO.
- \* private tourism interests: local tourism product providers, for example Kilvahan caravans, accommodation providers and publicans.
- \* indirectly involved groups: that is through rural regeneration, for example Laois LEADER Rural Development Company Ltd and Teagasc.

The sample of persons used in this research is structured around the inclusion of at least one representative from each of the above categories. In some cases a persons loyalties involved more than one of the above categories. The following selection of people were interviewed:

1. Orlagh Brady, is the Marketing Development Officer for Laois Tourism at present.
2. Catherine Gorman, was previously Tourism Officer in Laois, from 1992 to early 1993, Catherine was the regional tourism officer for both Laois and Offaly through Lakelands Tourism. In April 1994 Catherine returned as full time Tourism Officer for Laois until the end of 1996. Currently Catherine is the co-ordinator for the 'Rural Tourism' course at Dublin Institute of Technology, Cathal Brugha Street.
3. Tom O'Brien, is the Tourism Officer in Laois LEADER Rural Development Company Ltd. He helps bring local tourism projects to completion by administering grant aid and advice.
4. Mary Culliton, is a local woman with a keen interest in local history and community development, who is the secretary of Laois Tourism Association.
5. Henry Fingleton is also a local person and is proprietor of Kilvahan Caravans, formed in 1993, that provides traditional horse drawn caravans for hire.

As both the primary and secondary information on tourism development in Laois is sparse, these interviews were carried out in order to provide a more complete and up to-date picture. Each of the interviews were recorded and used in the compilation and analysis of the research.

The Questions: While no two interviews could have the exact same questions, as each of the interviewees had a different interest and function in the development of tourism in Laois, certain topics were questioned in each interview. The following is a basic outline of the pattern of topics questioned:

\* how did the person become involved in tourism initially, and what was their position/involvement in Laois Tourism.

\* what were the main developments in Laois Tourism over the last decade and who are the main organisations and groups involved.

\* how important is the visualisation of Laois's heritage in the development of its tourism potential.

\* is it necessary to visually enhance the landscape of Laois.

\* how important is a positive image of Laois in developing the county's tourism potential.

\* how important is a unique/thematic approach to developing tourism products in the county.

\* what role have local people to play in tourism and how will they benefit from the development of the county's tourism potential.

\* what are the remaining obstacles to developing tourism successfully in Laois.

\* are any adverse effects anticipated from tourism development in Laois.

[ *interview questions given in appendices* ]

## **CONCLUSION.**

This chapter has outlined what the thesis is about, how the information was researched and why it was done in this way. This thesis is concerned with tourism development in Ireland but especially in County Laois, an area that has only in the last decade made conscious attempts to develop its tourism potential. This information was researched in three ways. Firstly, secondary publications on the topic were researched. Secondly, primary research of Laois Tourism Association's Minute Book and tourism brochures was carried out. Finally, five people closely involved in Laois tourism were interviewed. This research is compiled and analysed in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **TOURISM IN COUNTY LAOIS.**

Introduction: It has already been noted that certain areas in Ireland have an established tradition of tourism. Resorts like Bray and Kilkee can trace the arrival of visitors back to the mid-eighteenth century. The growth of such towns has been primarily associated with the proximity of two natural features: the sea and a scenic landscape. However, many areas in Ireland do not have such obvious natural attractions. In these cases the development of tourism is more difficult. This chapter focuses on the development of tourism in such an area: County Laois.

Being an inland county has meant that Laois has no such history of tourism ( the county was only briefly mentioned by Richard Pococke on his Irish Tour in 1753 [ see McVeigh 1995, p132-6 ] ). However with changes in international tourist trends, that see tourists favouring scenic and heritage tourism over traditional sun and sea holidays ( see Urry 1990 and Gillmor in Breathnach P. 1994 ), inland counties like Laois should conceivably benefit. According to Board Failte ( 1996a, p86-94 ) the number of overseas visitors to the Midlands-East Region ( comprising counties Kildare, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath, Offaly-East, Wicklow and Westmeath ) has risen by 54percent between 1991 and 1995. The number of domestic visits to the region has also increased, though less dramatically by 3percent per anum. Such increases in visitor numbers has resulted in a 35percent rise in the region's tourism revenue for the corresponding period. Many factors may be held responsible for this change in destination choice, for example the more concerted efforts of the state, the EU and the local community towards rural regeneration that see an extension of tourist services; accommodation; activity and heritage attractions, in rural areas.

Yet the primary motivation to visit the rural area, instead of the seaside resort, must exist. Despite these changes however, Orlagh Brady ( Marketing and Development Officer for Laois Tourism, 1998, 15May ) points out that increases in the number of bednights spent in Laois is below the Midlands-East Region's average figure, and that .....Laois has one of the lowest flow through of tourists in the country.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section outlines the obstacles facing tourism development in Laois during the eighties. The second section provides an account of how tourism development was achieved over the last decade in Laois. In the third section a number of less obvious processes and approaches involved in tourism development are highlighted. In the final section sociological perspectives outlined in chapter two are applied to the case study.

## **THE OBSTACLES.**

In order to develop tourism in Laois two fundamental obstacles needed to be overcome. One, the lack of a tourism tradition in the county resulted in the absence of adequate tourism infrastructure; accommodation, services, information, attractions and activities were virtually non-existent during the early eighties. Furthermore the few accommodation providers that did exist did not engage in any joint marketing ventures. The absence of a 'tourism culture' in the county also meant that very few tourism entrepreneurs were emerging. Moreover many attractions: the Rock of Dunamaise, Aghaboe Abbey, Ballaghmore Castle and Rosconnell Church, for example, were dilapidated and overgrown with vegetation besides requiring information indicating their significance. Other sites, Ballyfin House, Stradbally Hall, Emo Court and Abbeyleix House were ...not open to the public or access and opening times were limited

( Convery and Flanagan 1992, p8 ). Finally a lack of experience in tourism development was also a problem in Laois in the eighties. There was no history of tourism in Laois before the eighties, resulting in underdeveloped tourism infrastructure, and shortages in tourism development experience and tourism entrepreneurs.

Two, Laois people and outsiders had a negative image of Laois. Laois people lacked confidence in the value of their heritage and subsequently did not identify Laois as having any tourism potential. Catherine Gorman ( Laois Tourism Officer 1992-1993 and 1994-1995 ) has pointed out that one of the main obstacles to developing tourism in Laois was ... getting local people to realise that they had something worthwhile in the county ( 1998, 25May ). People from other counties also have a negative image of Laois, according to Tom O'Brien ( Tourism Officer for Laois LEADER rural development company ) ... many outsiders mistakenly believe Laois to be a flat county ( 1998, 4June ). Such negative images of Laois needed to be overcome in order to develop a successful tourism sector in the county.

## **TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN LAOIS.**

In January 1987 Laois Tourism Association's steering committee voted unanimously to set up a Tourism Council. The purpose of this council was ... primarily to push along tourism in Laois and thereby generate more employment ( Minute Book of Laois Tourism Association ). This tourism council included private and public interests in tourism. Private interest came from local service providers; accommodations, restaurants and pubs. Public interest came from Laois County Council ( local authority ), traders associations, tidy-towns committees, the Leinster Express ( local newspaper ), local angling and golfing clubs, government agencies ( the regional tourism body- Lakelands Tourism, and an

agricultural body- Teagasc ) and other local voluntary groups, for example the Slieve Bloom Association.

Between 1987 and 1990 two fundamental problems undermined the efforts of Laois Tourism Association. Firstly, a lack of financial capital handicapped their ability to develop ideas and projects. The associations main source of finance came from the annual membership fee: £10 for individuals, £20 for accommodation and other service providers and £50 for hotels. The highest number of members during these early years was between thirty and forty, thus capital was very low. Furthermore Laois County Council's tourism allocation was given to the regional tourism body, Lakelands Tourism ( now Midlands-East Regional Tourism Organisation ). This lack of finance meant that the development of tourism brochures and attractions depended on assistance from the state, which was difficult to avail of at the time.

Secondly, the lack of a comprehensive tourism development plan during the early years also handicapped their efforts. Instead of a strategically planned approach to tourism development, Laois Tourism Association was concerned with developing a number of its 'tourism ideas', these included a Jazz Festival in Portlaoise, an O'Moore Clan Rally and the production of brochures and postcards of Laois. The development of a tourism plan would have been far more beneficial than developing isolated projects. A lack of tourism development experience is evident here. However disagreements between Laois Tourism Committee and the Regional Tourism Body ( Lakelands Tourism ) have also contributed to a lack of tourism development. For example in March 1989 Laois Tourism Committee rejected Lakelands Tourism's plan to promote Laois in certain shopping centres in Dublin on the basis that they believed that Lakelands should contribute at least 60percent of the £2750 estimated cost, instead of the proposed £600.



However in spite of such problems important projects and ideas had been identified by the committee, for example, the potential of developing Agri-tourism in the county, the need to provide access and safety at the Rock of Dunamaise, the potential for fishing at Grantstown Lake if developed, and the importance of providing longer opening hours at the Portlaoise Tourist Office. When the Regional Body and Laois Tourism Committee did work together the former's experience and expertise did benefit the Committee. At a meeting on April 23 1989 representatives from Lakelands outlined a number of basic tourism products Laois Tourism should improve and develop: signposting, a heritage trail, promoting angling and golfing and marketing the county as a stop-over destination.

In the early nineties Laois Tourism Committee continued to seek assistance from Lakelands in two ways. Firstly they asked that Laois be promoted more at Holiday Fairs since they did not have the resources necessary. Lakelands did promote Laois at various fairs: Manchester, Liverpool, Balmoral and Belfast. Laois also sought a Tourism Officer, which they eventually received in 1992, but who had to be shared with neighbouring county Offaly. During the early nineties the tourism committee continued its own work on producing postcards and brochures and also on specific plans for an Equestrian Centre. The Committee was also busy lobbying the Office of Public Works ( OPW ) to start work on the Rock of Dunamaise, and overseeing other projects like Grantstown Lake. These development of these projects was slow due to the lack of capital and the voluntary nature of the committee but also because of the slow response of Government bodies like the OPW.

A big breakthrough finally came in 1991 when the Environmental Institute at UCD were invited to compile a Development Strategy for tourism in the County. After numerous meetings and an extensive audit of the county Convery

and Flanagan's Tourism in County Laois - A Development Strategy was published in July 1992. Mary Culliton ( secretary of Laois Tourism Committee ) points out that ... these experts provided a basis for developing tourism in Laois ( 1998, 5June ). This development strategy outlined both short-term and medium-term objectives. Short-term objectives included increasing local authority investment in roads and signage; the provision of tourism information and guides; the improvement of services in restaurants, pubs and hotels; the development of at least one activity package; the appointment of a full time professional and finally the stimulation of public awareness about the tourism potential in Laois. Medium-term objectives outlined were concerned with improving the range of accommodation available; developing the walking and cycling routes; improving access to heritage sites; lobbying for planning and conservation laws; ensuring that farmers and landowners appreciate the value of the environment and tourism; that tourism products are packaged and marketed professionally and finally that there is co-ordination of all activities and information within Laois Tourism. Orlagh Brady ( Marketing and Development Officer for Laois Tourism ) points out that Convery and Flanagan's development strategy ... gave a focus and direction for tourism development in Laois during the nineties ( 1998, 15May ).

Another important factor during the early nineties was the provision of a Tourism Officer. Although Catherine Gorman had been working in this capacity through MERTO for both Offaly and Laois, a full time officer for Laois was ultimately desirable. In February 1993 Pauline Daly was appointed Laois Tourism Officer but had left by December that year. However at an AGM of Laois Tourism Committee on April 27, the chairman welcomed Catherine Gorman to her appointment as full time Tourism Officer in Laois. According to Catherine her work varied

from compiling a strategy for overall development to working with groups involved in tourism, from developing enterprises on the ground to servicing

the visitor, and from inspecting accommodations to marketing ( 1998, May25 ).

At present Orlagh Brady is Marketing and Development Officer for Laois Tourism. The appointment of full-time tourism officers in Laois has brought experience, expertise and knowledge to tourism development and marketing in Laois during the nineties.

Many projects were conceived of during the early nineties, for example: Grantstown Lake; the excavation at the Rock of Dunamaise; and the production of promotional brochures for Laois. The work of sub-committees, charged with organising and developing certain projects like angling, walking and improving other facilities like accommodation, was invaluable because Laois Tourism Association depended largely upon voluntary workers. Important contributions have also been made by Teagasc ( the Agriculture and Food Advisory Board ) by providing advice and training on agri-tourism enterprises. More recently Laois LEADER Rural Development Company Ltd have also provided technical assistance and grant aid on: capital investment, marketing, training and employment, for rural tourism projects.

The development of tourism has only been underway in Laois during the last decade. Whereas other areas, with coastlines and spectacular scenery, have had visitors since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their arrival in Laois has been less natural. Tourism in Laois is primarily the product of local voluntary effort, but with advice and financial assistance from government agencies: MERTO, Teagasc and the OPW. Tourism development in all rural areas has benefited from a diversified approach to rural development, instigated at EU level and implemented by the Irish Government. The Operational Programme for Local, Urban and Rural Development, the European Regional Development Fund and the LEADER Programmes ( 1 and 2 ) have instigated widespread interest in rural regeneration. The final result of all these efforts and

programmes is a range of tourism products and services across Laois today. These products and services may be categorised into three groups. The first consists of a range of accommodation available to the visitor: that includes hotels, bed and breakfasts, farmhouses, hostels, self-catering and caravan and camping parks. Secondly a range of activities have been developed with the tourist in mind: walking and cycling routes, equestrian and horse-drawn caravans, while angling and golfing facilities have been improved upon. Finally there are a number of historic sites and heritage centres that visitors can visit in Laois. Historic sites include the Rock of Dunamaise, Aghaboe Abbey and the Round Tower of Timahoe, while exhibitions at Abbeyleix Heritage House and Donaghmore Museum present local heritage to the visitor. Sites and buildings once overgrown and dilapidated, have been cleaned and restored to their original for the tourist, while interpretative centres have also been constructed in order to capture the essence of the county's heritage. Thus tourism development in Laois consists of providing services and constructing objects for the tourist gaze.

Are there any remaining obstacles for tourism development in Laois? According to Catherine Gorman ..local apathy, trying to construct too many developments at the same time and inadequate financing ( 1998, 25May ) are the major obstacles for Laois tourism development at present. Thus the local people are not completely convinced of the significance and potential their heritage. Catherine also points out that in the past the committee has developed a large number of tourism products at the same time, however because this took a long time, she believes that Laois tourism should concentrate on developing fewer products. Catherine also argues that Laois Tourism should link in with other regional Tourism groups for joint marketing. Henry Fingleton also identifies some problems for future tourism development in Laois

... there are no young people coming into tourism and there is not enough information available in the public sphere for anyone interested in

developing tourism products ( 1998, 13June ).

## **ANALYSING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN LAOIS.**

The physical construction of amenities and attractions has played a vital role in the development of tourism in Laois. However a number of processes and approaches can also be identified that have been instrumental in these developments, that are less obvious. These include: a sustainable approach to the landscape and environment; the construction of tourist imagery for the county; the representation of local heritage in modern 'heritage centres'; the recognition of the role of locals and the development of numerous tours and routes around the county.

Preserving the local environment: Laois does not have a spectacular landscape of high mountains, deep valleys and gushing rivers. According to Feehan ( 1983, p19 ) while Laois ... is on the whole a flat and at times monotonous landscape, it is by no means entirely so. Such impressions are broken down on closer examination of the county, revealing ... a surprisingly rich and diverse region ... of isolated hills and more continuous ridges ( ibid ). People interviewed pointed out that they were satisfied with the appeal of their surrounds ... the scenery in Laois is beautiful and unspoilt ... it is a place for relaxing, away from the turmoil and traffic ( Mary Culliton 1998, 5June ). Henry Fingleton ( proprietor of Kilvahan Horse-Drawn Caravans ) believes

... there is no need to develop the landscape of Laois, just to preserve it by improving the planning laws and prevent too many big developments ( 1998, June ).

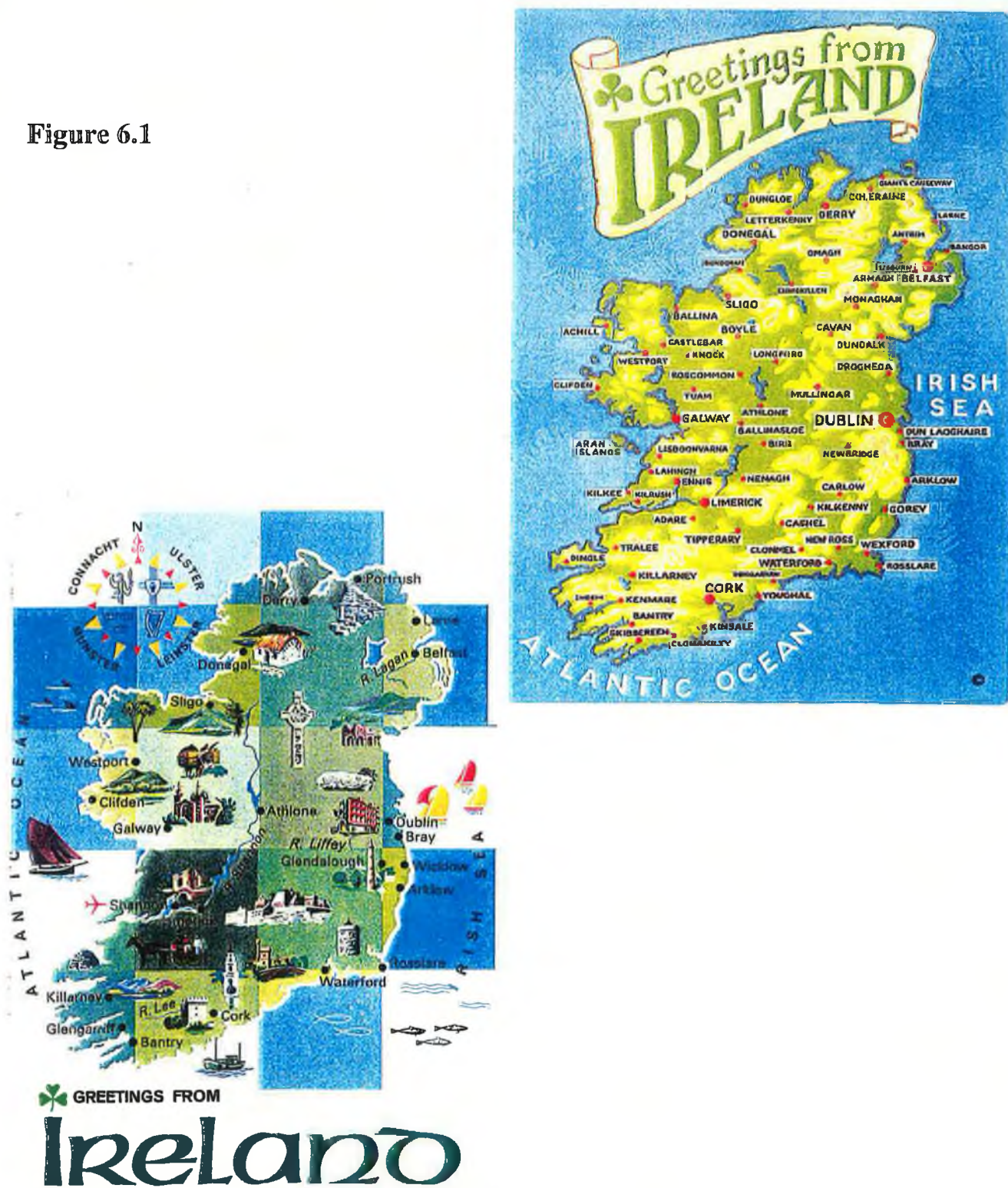
He also found that many of his customers, mainly Europeans and English visitors, thought Laois was paradise. People involved in the development of tourism in Laois have identified the importance of their landscape, which while not spectacular does provide a tranquillity increasingly difficult to find.

In order to maintain this tranquillity the development of large scale accommodation complexes in the Slieve Bloom Mountains has been resisted. Laois Tourism Committee has taken a sustainable approach to tourism development, which recognises the importance of development that produces employment opportunities but also resists environmental destruction. According to Tom O'Brien of Laois LEADER Rural Development Company projects are environmentally guided in order to cause minimum destruction ( 1998, 4June ). In a recent publication from Laois Tourism Committee and the Laois Nationalist ( a local newspaper ) there is an emphasis on the county's preserved rural quality

Enjoy the rural tranquillity of county Laois there is so much to see and so much to do. It is a walkers and cyclists paradise. Discover the secrets of the Slieve Blooms with their beautiful glens, waterfalls, nature trails, wooded areas and rivers ( A Guide to county Laois 1998, p3 ).

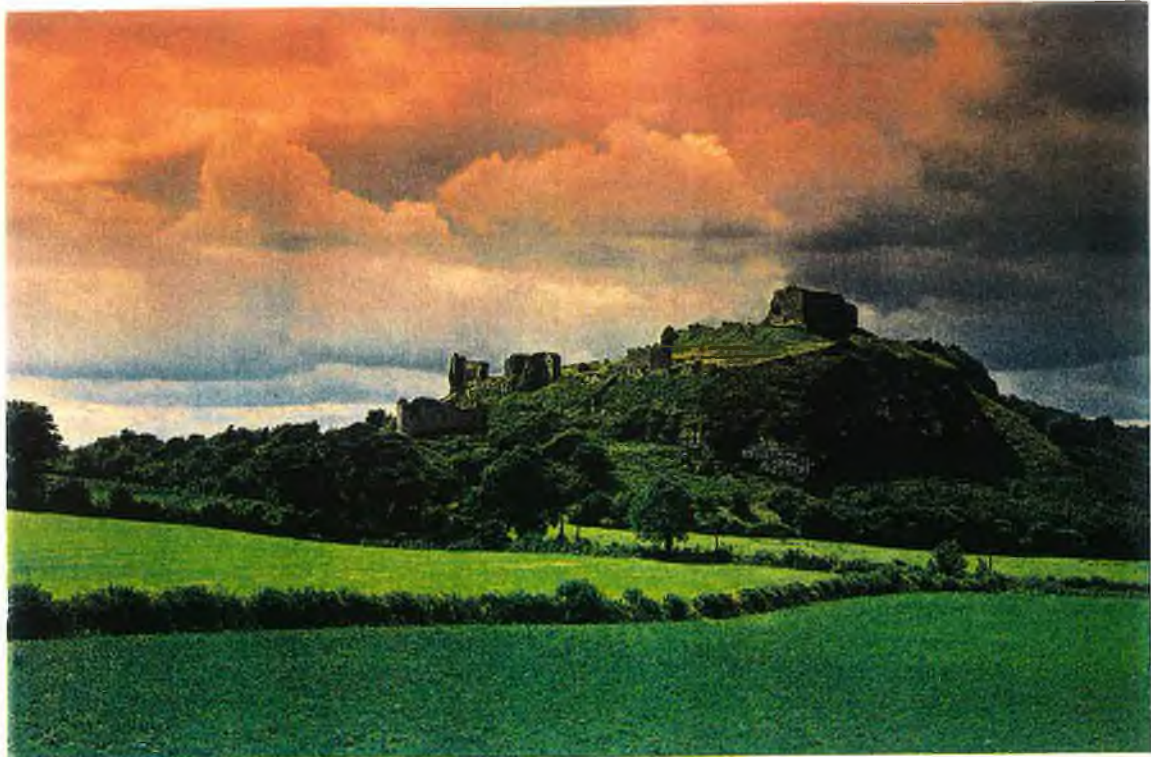
Creating 'tourist imagery' for Laois: The preservation of rural tranquillity is an important feature in yet another process underway within tourism development in Laois. This is the creation of an image of Laois as a tourist destination through postcards and promotional brochures of the county. This also consists of breaking down the negative images that have existed of the county and its main towns. Tom O'Brien noted that many people wrongly perceive Laois to be a ... flat county with plenty of bogs, while in fact there is little peat history in the county ( 1998, 4June ). Catherine Gorman pointed out that Portlaoise is synonymous with its Jail and in the past received bad publicity in certain tourism booklets, for example The Rough Guide to Ireland. Laois has also been under-represented at Holiday Fairs, in brochures and postcards ( see figure 6.1 ) of Ireland. One of the main aims of Laois Tourism Committee since 1987 has been to produce a range of tourist brochures and postcards ( see figure 6.2 and 6.3 ) that portray Laois as a viable tourist destination. This committee has also sent representatives to various holiday fairs in Ireland, Britain and Europe.

Figure 6.1



Two common postcards of Ireland that highlight the main tourist attractions. However as Laois has not been perceived as a 'tourist county', in the past, it is not mentioned in either postcard.

**Figure 6.2**  
Postcards from Laois: The Rock of Dunamaise and Mountmellick



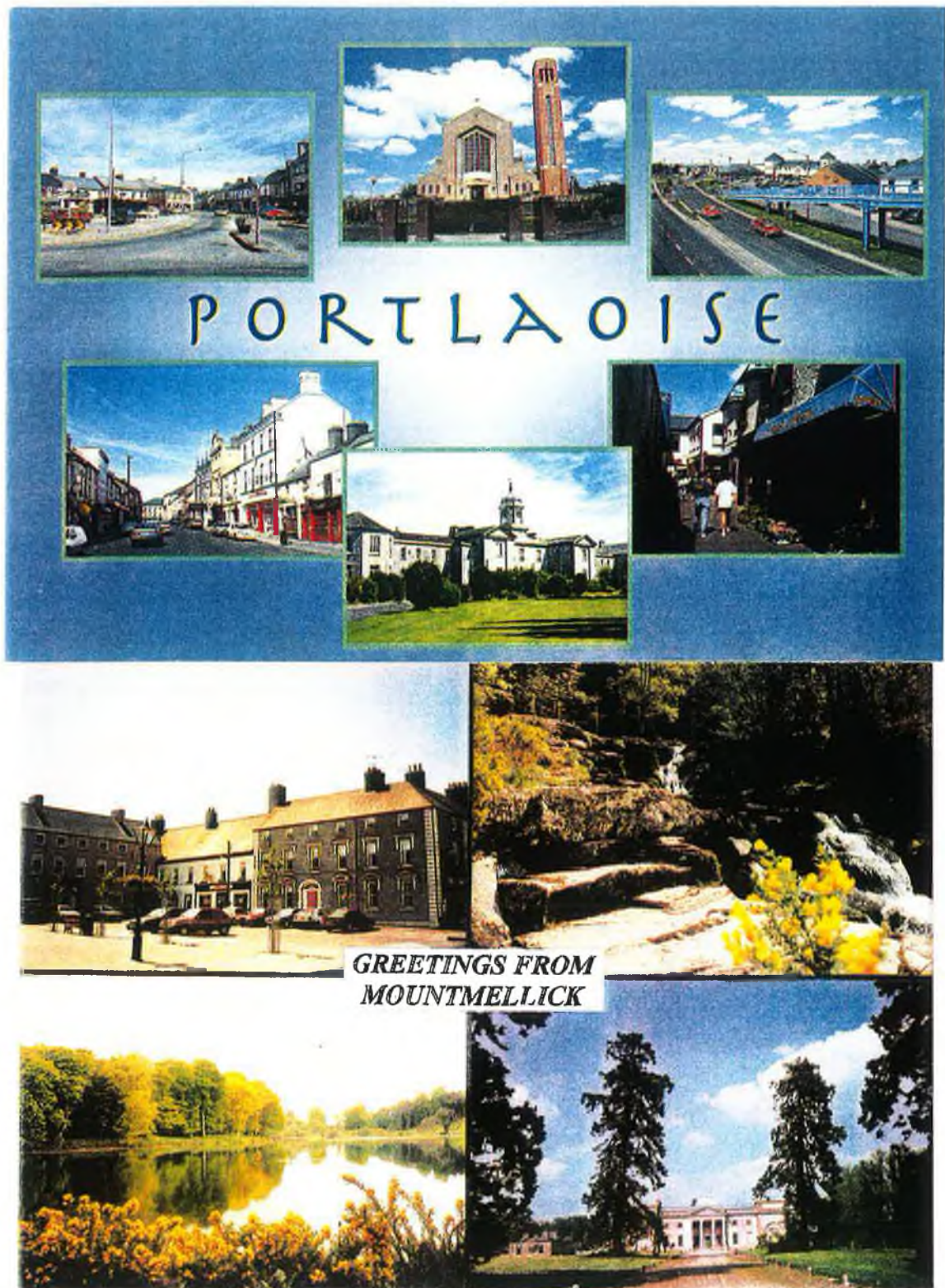
*Rock of Dunamase, Portlaoise, Co. Laois, Ireland.*

*Photography: Peter O'Toole.*





**Figure 6.3**  
Other postcards of Laois: Portlaoise and Mountmellick.



The creation of 'tourist imagery' for Laois has involved the production of postcards that highlight the county's historical significance, its rural tranquility and the architecture of its main towns.

These publications and representations highlight the tourist services and products available in Laois: the rural tranquillity, the range of activities and accommodation available, the historic and heritage attractions, the friendly people and the architecture of the main towns. Picturesque landscapes and townscapes are used in postcards, especially the Slieve Bloom Mountains, the Rock of Dunamase, Portlaoise and Mountmellick. Specialised brochures have been produced for golfing and angling, while pamphlets provided details of walking and cycling routes. The county's heritage centres and historical sites have also been publicised in brochures and pamphlets. In the most recent publication from Laois Tourism Committee the chairman said

this publication will give every reader a chance to see how Laois is just a wonderful and friendly place to visit and stay and enjoy Laois and its people ( A Guide to county Laois 1998, p3 ).

Thus besides physically constructing attractions and amenities tourism development also involves marketing a new image of Laois: as a tranquil rural region worth visiting but also with plenty of activities and attractions. However it will take time to overcome the negative image of Laois, as a boring midland county, that has developed in the past. The most difficult aspect of this will be to convince the locals of this new image of their county.

The locals' role in tourism: People involved in tourism development in Laois identify a crucial role for locals in the success of tourism in Laois. Catherine Gorman points out that local people are ... ambassadors for their own county ( 1998, 25May ). The tourism experience depends largely upon the interaction between the local and the visitor. If the visitor finds this interaction interesting and pleasurable the experience is recommended to other tourist friends. Catherine ( *ibid* ) also notes that tourism also benefits the local community ... besides the obvious economic benefits to the community .. there are important social effects ... tourism helps people look at themselves and see what they have .it creates pride and confidence. Tom O'Brien points out that local people stand to benefit indirectly

from the growth of tourism in an area ( 1998, 4June ). Mary Culliton argues that tourism increases the demand for local produce and services in an area and thus creates additional employment opportunities for locals, besides the extra choice of services and products. According to Henry Fingleton

... tourism is about people, about getting authentic experiences, where everybody benefits as money earned filters down from a strong tourism economy ( 1998, 13June ).

Laois tourism committee thus envisages a central role for local people in the success of tourism in the county. They also point out that locals stand to benefit economically and socially from tourism success. However the majority of local people stand to benefit indirectly rather than directly from tourism growth in Laois. According to Tom O'Brien

... LEADER 2 does not specifically target marginalised people because matching funds are required in all grant aided projects ( 1998, 4June ).

The representation of heritage in Laois: Another important process underway in Laois is the representation of the regions' heritage in interpretative centers and museums. Exhibitions are on display in Abbeyleix Heritage House, Donaghmore Museum and Laois Arts and Crafts Gallery. The latter is a showcase for the areas talented artists and craftpersons that includes: painting, pottery, furniture making, sculpting, needle works and basketmaking. For the purposes of this study the Arts and Crafts Gallery is omitted because it is considered more of a gallery than an interpretative centre. Both displays in Abbeyleix Heritage House and Donaghmore Museum aim to provide the visitor with an insight into the culture and history of Laois through the use of artefactual, visual and literary displays.

Donaghmore Museum encapsulates three important local themes: Agriculture, the Workhouse experience and the Co-operative movement. The first two are the more dominant displays with the co-operative display only taking up a small area at the entrance. The Workhouse theme is encapsulated by the building

itself, an original Workhouse that has been cleaned, and by the information plaques on the walls. These plaques provide information about the Workhouse: why they were introduced, who entered them, the rules and the daily activities of the inmates. A brochure that gives more information is also available. But besides the building itself none of the workhouses' daily life has been artefactually or visually presented for the visitor. This theme itself is dull and morose, but its presentation needs to be enhanced so that the visitor may enjoy the learning experience. The lack of visual displays on the Workhouse theme detracts from the visitors appreciation because the literature plaques do not create a complete picture of the topic. On the other hand the second main theme, Agriculture, contains too many artefacts and not enough information. Thus there is no understanding of how these implements operated and consequently no appreciation of the importance of Agriculture to local livelihoods. Instead of a long line of implements on display, this theme would be better understood if their operation was displayed or if visitors were invited to operate them, similarly facts and figures of what locals consumed and sold would give an idea of how relevant agriculture has been in their lives. The least dominant theme, of the Co-operative movement in the area, is presented through artefactual and literary displays, a combination which provides a more educational experience than the other more dominant displays.

The exhibition in Abbeyleix Heritage House is also housed in an original building, that served as a monastery and more recently as a school in the past. The permanent display may be divided into two sections. The first deals with the history of County Laois: from the Stone Age through Anglo-Norman arrivals, the constructions on the Rock of Dunamaise and the Abbey at Abbeyleix to the Middle Ages, dominated by English invasions and eventually plantations of the county. Unfortunately more recent history of the nineteenth and twentieth century is absent from this section. Three interpretative modes

are employed in this section: literary plaques provide literature on the topic; artefacts recovered and preserved give the visitor and insight into the crafts and labours of the past; while visual displays ( models of the Rock of Dunamaise and the Abbey at Abbeyleix ) or reconstructions also give an insight into past lives. The combination of all three modes in this section ensures that the visitor is entertained and educated. The second section focuses on the local heritage of Abbeyleix. This section uses the same three modes of presentation used in the first section. Themes of daily life in Abbeyleix are presented through artefactual, literary and visual displays. These themes include clothing, sports, transport, agriculture and the monastic life. A special sub-section on the Abbeyleix Carpet Factory is also maintained through the literary and artefactual modes of presentation. Once again these exhibitions were found to be educational and entertaining.

Another heritage centre is planned for Mountmellick, which would deal with the towns Quaker past and the famous 'Mountmellick Embroidery' needlework. It is planned to link this heritage centre into a training facility and craft shop. However it is unclear what modes of representation will be employed in this centre. With only two interpretive centres in the county the presentation of heritage is only a small part of the overall tourism product. However critical points have been raised in chapter two concerning 'the heritage centre' by Brett, Sheerin, and Mullane, concerning heritage centres in Ireland, and by Urry, concerning heritage production in England. Brett and Sheerin have argued that a the lack of local consultation in their design produces an inaccurate account of the heritage. This does not seem to have effected either centre in Laois, where the themes chosen are very relevant. They also argue that the visual mode of representation has elevated enjoyment above education in the heritage centre. However one center in Laois does not contain enough entertainment while the other may contain slightly too much. However

it is worth noting their criticism, that the production of heritage in these centres cannot hope to completely encapsulate past social experiences of the locality.

The consumption of landscapes and townscapes: Tourist in Laois are also invited to consume a number of other commodities; the landscape and townscapes of the county. A number of routes and tours have been constructed for the tourist that encompass the best scenery and social experiences in Laois. These tours may be done in a car, on a bus, on foot or on a bicycle ( A Guide to County Laois 1998 ). For the ultimate experience of Laois: its landscape, towns, and people, the tourist may hire a horse-drawn caravan and make their way through the quieter parts of the county. These are caravans are refurbished gypsy caravans, but with a few basic mod cons added in.

Visitors travel through the county on a variety of quiet country roads, passing rivers, lakes, forests, historical sites and of course lots of pubs. At night you may park at one of the 14 designated stopover points, these may be quiet country pubs, or rustic farmhouses, they all offer good toilet and shower facilities, caravan parking area and a field for the horse to graze in ( Kilvahan Horse-Drawn Caravans: Information Sheet ).

During these tours the visitor samples the visual delights of the county: the picturesque villages of Stradbally, Rosenallis, Castletown, Cullahill, Ballacolla, Timahoe and Emo; the captivating scenery of the Slieve Bloom Mountains and the Slieve Margy area; the serenity of Cash, Heywood, Abbey Sensory and Emo Court gardens; the ancient sites of Aghaboe Abbey, Timahoe Round Tower, Ballaghmore Castle and the Rock of Dunamais; and the architectural delights of Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, Portarlinton and Portlaoise. There is also a Sculpture trail and a range of monuments around the county. Therefore another type of tourist is catered for in Laois, other than the visitor pursuing certain activities, one who travels the county in search of visual delights and exotic experiences. This tourist is like the modern *flâneur* ( see Urry 1990 and Slater 1998 ) who strolls the streets of our modern cities and is dazzled by the visual concoction that greets and entices him. In recent years many towns in

Laois have received considerable infrastructural improvements, for example Mountmellick and Portlaoise, that have visually enhanced their appearance and made them more pedestrian friendly. Therefore improving the visual appearance of the county's landscapes and townscapes and demarcating special scenic routes are processes that are underway in Laois.

## **THE SOCIOLOGY OF TOURISM IN LAOIS.**

The tourists experience in Laois is based on three tourism products that have been developed over the last decade. These are the accommodation experience, the activity product and the heritage experience. In this section a number of sociological perspectives that have been outlined in chapter two are applied to these tourist experiences in Laois.

The Accommodation Experience: A range of accommodation services are available in Laois: these include hotels, bed and breakfasts, farmhouses, hostels, self-catering units and caravan and camping facilities. Boorstin argues that unlike early travel the modern tourism experience is based on comfort, pleasure and passivity. He also argued that the modern tourism experience is false, because the real native experience is not encountered. While hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation in Laois does undoubtedly aim to provide comfort and pleasure for the visitor, camping facilities do not provide the tourist with the same degree of comfort. It is also difficult to maintain that accommodation in Laois is contrived. While the hotels do not accurately reflect how locals live, bed and breakfast and farmhouse accommodation do provide a more accurate reflection. These services are set within the everyday lives of locals and the tourist may experience these conditions first hand. While certain areas are constructed or altered for the visitor, the bedrooms and diningroom, other areas, for example kitchens, halls and the common room, are original

constructs. Farmhouse accommodation also offers the tourist the opportunity to experience the daily work carried out on the farm. Therefore Boorstin's argument, that modern tourism provides comfortable and pleasurable experiences that are ultimately false, is not universally applicable to the accommodation experience in Laois.

According to MacCannell modern tourism is a quest for authentic experiences which results in the construction of 'stages' of authenticity. Accommodation in Laois provides 'staged authenticity' in Bed and Breakfast and Farmhouse accommodation, where the dining room and the ( en-suited ) bedrooms are constructs for the visitor. These constructs provide the social space for the tourist - host interaction. However the tourist may also experience real work in progress if staying at Farmhouse accommodation in Laois. Thus while MacCannell's observation may be applied to many instances of accommodation, for example hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation, there is an exception, the Farmhouse experience, that undermines the validity of his theory.

Cohen has argued that there are a range of tourist experiences. He points out that they depend on the relationship between the tourists 'centre' ( the meaning of life ) and the 'centre' of the society in which they live. According to Cohen's model certain tourists travel for recreation ( the recreational mode ), others for diversion ( the diversionary mode ) and more in search of authentic experiences ( the experimental, existential and experiential modes ). Those in search of recreation may use hotels or camping facilities. Tourists in search of authentic experiences may stay at the farmhouses or bed and breakfasts, while tourists seeking diversion may engage any type that provides a different atmosphere to their daily living quarters. Yet there is no concrete evidence, in the form of data on visitor motivation, that would validate Cohen's conclusions in the case of the accommodation experience in Laois.



According to Urry while the tourist experience may differ from region to region there are certain basic characteristics. He points out that all tourism involves travelling to another region or country, that offers a different set of social experiences and gazes, and staying there for a short period with the intention of returning home afterwards. During this time the tourist engages in activities and experiences that would not normally be engaged in daily life. Also the routine of working and resting is broken, now the person spends more time resting and enjoying leisure pursuits. The accommodation experience in Laois offers the tourist a set of unique social relations and gazes. Many tourists come from European cities to experience the rural tranquillity and friendliness of locals in Laois. This constitutes a move away from everyday social relations and gazes for them. Therefore Urry's analysis of the tourist experience is applicable to the accommodation experience offered in Laois.

While Boorstin's and MacCannell's theories may be applied to certain accommodation services in Laois, they are not universally applicable. On the other hand Cohen's theory may be correlated with the range of accommodation services available, but without information on visitor motivations his theory remains invalidated. Urry's analysis however applies to the accommodation experience in Laois.

Activities in Laois: A range of activities may be pursued by the visitor to Laois. These include angling, golfing, cycling, walking and equestrian. The existence of these activities refutes Boorstin's claim that modern tourism is passive. But because these activities aim to provide pleasure for the tourist validates Boorstin's claim that modern tourism is concerned with pleasing the tourist. He also claimed that the modern tourist experience is contrived, indeed many of these activities have been constructed with the tourist in mind, like angling, walking, cycling and equestrian, while others like golfing have existed

previously. It is more difficult to qualify whether these activities are false, that they are not part of the local experience. Tourists are invited to enjoy the same golfing facilities, to walk and cycle in the same environment, as the locals. Therefore while walking tours, cycling routes and improved angling facilities constitute false and contrived experiences, it is less obvious that golfing is contrived. Again Boorstin's theory does not universally apply.

MacCannell argues that tourism products and services are 'staged'. Certainly the provision of guided walking routes and cycling tours and improved angling facilities appears to 'stage' the activity experience. However tourists and locals share the same golf courses and physical environment in Laois. Therefore not all activities in Laois are 'staged' for the tourist.

The lack of information on tourist motivations again postpones any validity of Cohen's model. While it appears to be the case that some tourists come to Laois for recreation, others for diversion and more to experience authentic activities, it is by no means certainly so. In the absence of any concrete data on tourist motivations, we may only speculate that the presence of activities in Laois concurs with Cohen's assessment that tourists travel for recreation, diversion or authenticity.

According to Urry activity holidays in Laois should take place in a totally different environment than the tourists normal habitat and should provide a different social experience for visitors. According to Henry Fingleton ( 1998, 13June ) the majority of his customers are European or British. Therefore the rural tranquillity and rural lifestyle in Laois provides a stark contrast to the tourists' daily surrounds and social relations. The validation of Urry's assertion cannot be validated because there is no information on the origin of those tourists, who engage activities in Laois, available at present. Again it may only be stated that it seems to be the case that visitors choose Laois because it offers contrasts to their everyday surrounds and social relations. But this seems to

negate the importance of considering expense when tourists are deciding which destination to visit. Urry also pointed to two types of gaze: the romantic gaze is associated with viewing picturesque scenery that creates a semi-spiritual experience and the collective gaze where the crowd creates the atmosphere. In this framework angling, walking and cycling in Laois constitute 'romantic gazing', while golfing resembles 'collective gazing'.

Therefore while only certain ideas from Boorstin and MacCannell may be applied to certain activities in Laois, Cohen's and Urry's analyses appear more comprehensive in their coverage.

The Heritage Experience: Tourists in Laois are offered two ways to experience the county's heritage: they may visit historical sites and buildings, some of which have been restored, or they may visit the interpretative centres, that attempt to transmit an understanding using different modes of representation. Boorstin maintains that modern tourism is contrived and ultimately false. While heritage is constructed in the heritage centre, it is uncertain that this is a false experience. The aim of these centres is to provide accurate knowledge of the area's history, thus it depends on the outcome of their efforts. However we have already noted that it is impossible to provide a complete picture of historical social experiences through modern modes of representation. Therefore the experiences these centres transmit are false. However other historical sites that transmit an experience of the area's heritage are not constructed. Emo Court, Ballyfin House and Ballaghmore have been refurbished to their original state, while The Rock of Dunamase and Aghaboe Abbey have been preserved. These sites give the visitor real experiences of the past and allow them to contemplate, as much as possible, what past lives were like. Boorstin may be correct to say that some experiences of modern tourism are contrived and false, but certainly not all.

It is also the case that some of the heritage experiences offered in Laois constitutes 'staged authenticity'. Abbeyleix Heritage House and Donaghmore Museum offer the tourist to experience reconstructed history. Other cases, like Aghaboe Abbey and Timahoe Round Tower, however offer the tourist the opportunity to experience the real article in its original environment. Therefore MacCannell's analysis is not universally applicable as some of the heritage products in Laois are 'staged' while others are original.

For Cohen certain tourists are motivated by the search for authenticity, those in the experiential, experimental and existential modes. Again these propositions remain speculative in the absence of data on visitor motivations. For example it is impossible to assert, as Cohen does, that some tourist in the experiential mode, who feel alienated from their own society, visit heritage sites to seek reassurance that some people live authentic lives. Or that others in the experiential mode, also alienated, travel to different cultures in search of a life of meaning. It is possible that such motivations may exist, but without information on tourist motivations it cannot be proved.

Urry has identified the growth of heritage as an instrumental part of modern tourism. He also notes that heritage does not fit neatly in his three dichotomies of tourism: modern/historical, authentic/inauthentic and romantic/collective. For example heritage centres are modern inventions but their subject is historical. It is also uncertain whether they are authentic or inauthentic, using both original artefacts and modern modes of presentation to communicate the heritage. Heritage centres pose a problem for Urry's classification.

Therefore the heritage centre is a construction that blurs previously defined boundaries. Urry has noted that the predominant emphasis on visualisation creates an artefactual history that overlooks a variety of social experiences. Similar caution has been expressed over the presentation of heritage in Ireland. Brett and Sheerin have argued that the lack of local participation in the design

of heritage centres leads to inaccurate presentations. They also argue that the use of modern modes of presentation overemphasize the role of enjoyment in these centres. While Mullane has criticised the conservative approach of the OPW because it does not inform or educate the visitors. The aim of the heritage centres in Laois has been to educate tourists about local history and culture, but it is uncertain whether these objectives have been achieved in the absence of any information on their effect on the visitor. It is therefore recommended that such information should be compiled and analysed in order to understand the ambiguities that surround heritage centres.

In this section sociological perspectives have been applied to tourism in Laois. While Boorstin's analysis has been commended for its critical approach it has been found too rigid in application to the case study. His theory does not apply to all accommodation, activity or heritage products. Similarly MacCannell's concept of staged authenticity is not universally applicable to the range of tourism products and services in Laois. While Cohen has constructed a broader theory that outlines five different tourist experiences, it remains speculative in the absence of data on visitor motivations. Finally Urry has produced an accurate assessment of the nature of tourism. However he also noted the development of heritage tourism which proves more difficult to explain. His cautions are also supported in certain studies on Irish heritage centres, by Brett and Sheerin. Therefore it is recommended that more research into the effects of heritage production be carried out in Laois.

## **CONCLUSION.**

The aim of this chapter has been to outline and analyse the results of the research on tourism development in Laois. Tourism has developed in Laois due to the efforts of a local voluntary group. Advice and assistance has also been provided by the regional state tourism agency ( MERTO ), Teagasc and Laois

Leader. The fruits of these efforts may be seen in the range of tourism products and services provided in Laois today: the accommodation, activity and heritage attractions. However their development has also involved a number of processes and approaches that are less tangible. These include the construction of a tourist image for Laois, the creation of a 'tourism facilitator' role for locals, the presentation and packaging of local heritage and the development of aspects of the landscape and townscapes for tourist consumption. Therefore developing tourism in Laois at times constitutes development of what is expected rather than what is actually the case. The final section attempted to test the validity of certain sociological claims about tourism. For example; Boorstin's claim that modern tourism is contrived and ultimately false; MacCannell's theory that tourism is 'staged authenticity'; Cohen's argument that there are five basic types of tourist and Urry's notion of tourism's basic characteristics and essentially different social relations. However a re-occurring problem emerged, that a lack of data on visitors to Laois reduces the attempt to speculation. In light of the seriousness surrounding the ambiguities of tourism it would be important to gather such information and research the matter in more detail.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION.

The aim of this thesis has been to outline and analyse the development of tourism in County Laois. In order to outline the context of this development 'the history of tourism in Ireland' and the rise of 'rural tourism' have been highlighted. A sparsity of secondary publications meant that a number of people closely involved in tourism development in Laois had to be interviewed. In the analysis of the research findings a number of sociological perspectives on tourism have been employed.

Certain regions in Ireland have a long history of tourism development while others have only recently begun to develop tourism potential. Coastal areas and scenic regions, like Bray and Kilkee, can trace the arrival of visitors back to the mid-eighteenth century. During this early period, tourism in Ireland shared many similar characteristics with the English experience, most notably the presence of the social elite and the social activities they enjoyed. Urry has identified the rise of 'mass tourism' in England during the nineteenth century, a feature that did not emerge in Ireland until the 1950s and 1960s. A lack of industrialisation has been the main factor used in explaining this discrepancy. During the Inter-war years the Anglo-Irish elite's dominance was broken down, with a new dominant group, the Catholic commercial, professional and farming class, emerging. Lower income families also began to appear at these destinations, although only on day trips and weekend excursions, through the introduction of paid holidays and the provision of a cheaper mode of transport, the bus. The initial years of the Post-war period saw substantial growth in Irish tourism which eventually declined as facilities were re-constructed in Britain and Europe.

The success of a new industrial policy stimulated the growth of domestic tourism during the fifties and sixties, however the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland reversed this trend and the remainder of the seventies were spent recovering from the decline.

However by the nineties the situation had once again changed, this time to such an extent that the World Tourism Organisation pointed out that tourism in Ireland had grown faster than any other European country. This growth has been related to the changes in international destination choice: from 'sun-lust' to 'wander-lust' holidays. Within this context, the opportunity for growth exists for economically marginalised rural areas to exploit their 'rural tourism' potential.

The importance of rural tourism has also been related to a diversified approach to rural development that aims to combat the spread of rural decline. Previously rural development was associated with the development of agriculture, but the modernisation of agriculture only produced a polarised rural community: consisting of a minority of successful farms and a majority of marginalised farming households. The introduction of price supports in the CAP however did not resolve this problem. Community groups began to tackle the problem themselves but local apathy and the lack of capital ultimately undermined their efforts. Recently the EU and the Irish state have instigated an Area based approach to rural development: that encourages local participation in partnership with commercial interests in developing many sectors of the rural economy, for example forestry, aquaculture and tourism. However 'rural tourism' has been criticised by academics who point out that: the most marginalised households have not benefited; the rural environment may be damaged and that local lifestyle and identity may be effected. These claims seem to be supported in an analysis of the Ballyhoura region where rural tourism provides only supplementary income.



It is within this context, the increasing importance of the tourism industry in Ireland, that a local group in Laois have developed a range of tourism products and services that previously did not exist in the county. However two major obstacles had to be overcome: a prevailing negative image of the county and the lack of local experience and entrepreneurs in tourism development. A tourism committee was formed in 1987 consisting of local people interested in tourism. During the initial years a lack of finance and expertise handicapped their efforts. However with the publication of Tourism in County Laois - A Development Strategy in 1992 and the appointment of a full-time Tourism Officer in the county in 1993, a more professional and productive approach was instigated. Yet without voluntary local effort the range of tourism products and services in Laois today would not exist.

Constructing tourism as a product in Laois is perceived to create more employment and income in the county. This may certainly be the case for the product and service providers in the county. However a number of less tangible processes and approaches within tourism development have also been identified. These include: a sustainable approach to the environment; the construction of tourist imagery for the county; the representation of local heritage in modern 'heritage centres'; the recognition of the role of 'facilitator' for locals and the development of numerous tours and routes for the visitor. The consequences of these processes are not entirely obvious. For example it may be the case, as O'Connor has argued, that the construction of tourist imagery that only relates to external opinions and expectations ultimately has a negative effect on local identity and self-worth. It may also be argued, as Sheerin and Brett have, that the formulation and nature of representations in 'heritage centres' produces an incomplete picture of past social experiences and that its emphasis on entertainment and

enjoyment reduces this history to spectacle, thus undermining local history, lifestyle and culture. Also the creation of tours and routes, that encompass the best 'landscapes' and 'townscapes', is an example of constructing products for the visitors pleasure. Crucially these products, the landscape, the townscape and the unique social experience in Laois, are also the basis of how locals define themselves. Thus by altering these features locals lose the benchmarks which demarcate their identity and lifestyle. Also in the absence of concrete data it is not obvious that the locals benefit economically from tourism development in Laois. According to Byrne et al the most marginalised households have not benefited from rural tourism in Connemara. Yet the accurate assessment of these effects of tourism development in Laois is not possible in the absence of information on: tourist impressions, tourist-host interaction, local attitudes to tourism and possible lifestyle and cultural changes.

We also attempted to test various theories outlined in chapter two against the case study. For example Boorstin argued that modern tourism is pleasurable, comfortable, contrived and ultimately a false experience. MacCannell disagrees arguing that tourism is a search for 'authenticity' or real lives. However because this search interferes with real life a 'staged authenticity' is provided for the tourist. Thus any falseness in tourism arises from necessity according to MacCannell and not, according to Boorstin, in order to satisfy our desire for superficiality. Cohen has proposed that a range of tourist experiences exist, depending on the individuals relationship to his society. Urry argued that the tourist experience differs in each place yet there are certain basic characteristics in all tourism. Among these is the inverted nature of tourism's social relations. From the analysis it appears Boorstin and MacCannell's theories are too rigid, while Cohen's appears

too speculative in the absence of data on visitor motivations. Urry has produced the most universally applicable theory.

In this thesis it was argued that tourism is becoming increasingly important economically in Modern Ireland. In order to reap these benefits tourism is being constructed as a product in County Laois. Through the application of sociology this thesis has outlined the less obvious effects of constructing tourism as a product in Laois that ultimately lead to local cultural change.

## APPENDIX ONE:

Interviewer: Michael F. Culleton.

Interviewee: Orla Brady, Marketing Development Executive for Laois Tourism, 1996 - present.

1. Are you aware of any history of tourism in Co. Laois, that is before 1980 and if so what did these tourists do?
2. The Midlands-East Region has experienced significant increases in visitor numbers, revenue earned and accomodation capacity during the nineties. Has Laois Tourism kept apace with the Midlands-East region in these respects?
3. Who are the main players and organisations involved in the managing and marketing of tourism in Laois? How important are the people of Co. Laois to the success of Laois Tourism? What are the main strategies/projects involved?
4. How much has happened since the publication of Frank Convery and Sheila Flanagans' Tourism in Co. Laois - A Development Strategy in 1992 ?
5. In developing a tourism product for Laois what will the theme(s) be? How will the products, the rural tourism product and the heritage product, be unique? Is there any scope for a heritage product based on the peatlands, given that such a product has already been developed and marketed in Co. Offaly, in order words can you do anything more with the bogs?
6. Given that Laois does have a significant history, what is being done to represent this history in a visual way for tourists, given that much of this is buried in books?
7. Do you plan to make the landscape of Laois visually attractive for visitors? If so, how?
8. Do you anticipate any problems with the development of these plans/ Do you think the development of tourism in Laois will have any adverse effects? For example, the presence of tourists in itself may change local values and outlooks, or that tourism, instead of helping the most needy, only reinforces existing economic differences.

## APPENDIX TWO:

Interviewee: Catherine Gorman, Tourism Officer in Co. Laois 1992 - 1993 and 1994 - 1996.

1. How did you become involved in Tourism? And could you tell me about your position in Laois Tourism?
2. At the time of your appointment what were the main obstacles to developing tourism in Laois? What were your main objectives during your time in Laois and what were the main projects and Programmes under your supervision?
3. How important was Midlands East Regional Tourism Organisation ( MERTO ) in facilitating the development of tourism in Laois?
4. With the different levels of tourism development that exist in Ireland at present, do you think it is advisable for Laois tourism to develop its heritage and rural tourism products based on a unique or distinct theme that is relevant to its heritage? Was this in evidence during your time in Laois?
5. Do you think that there is a need to visually enhance the landscape of Laois in order to compete with Wicklow, Kerry or Galway?
6. How important is the visualisation of Laois's heritage given that much of the history of Laois has remained buried in books?
7. How important is national publicity for the success of tourism in Laois?
8. What role have the people of Laois to play in the development of tourism successfully? How will these local people benefit?
9. What are in your opinion the major obstacles for developing a successful tourism sector in Laois?
10. Do you anticipate any problems with the development of tourism in Laois? For example a market driven approach will more than likely maintain present economic divisions.

## **APPENDIX THREE:**

Interviewee: Tom O'Brien, Tourism Officer in Laois LEADER Rural Development Company Ltd.

1. How are you involved in Laois Tourism?
2. How important are the development of heritage and rural tourism products to the success of tourism and rural development in Laois? Do you think it is advisable for Laois Tourism to develop its heritage and rural tourism products through a unique thematic approach that would underline the uniqueness of the county?
3. How important is visualising Laois's heritage, as is done in Abbeyleix's museum, for the success of tourism in the county?
4. Is there a need to improve the image of Laois and publicise the assets of the county?
5. What role have local people to play in the development of tourism in Laois?
6. Given that LEADER 2 aims to help rural areas help themselves, how have rural tourism projects under Laois LEADER 2 benefitted economically marginalised people in Laois ?
7. Do you anticipate any adverse effects from the development of heritage and rural tourism products in Laois, for example on the environment and local traditional lifestyle?

## APPENDIX FOUR:

Interviewee: Mary Culliton. member of Laois Tourism Association.

1. When did you become involved in the development of Laois Tourism? Could you describe the situation as it was then, that is who was involved, what were the aims of the group and what were the main problems obstructing the group?
2. After this initial stage what were the most important steps, in your view, that contributed to the level of tourism development in Laois today? For example Convery and Flanagan's development strategy and the appointment of a full time tourism marketing officer.
3. John Feehans' book Laois - An Environmental History uncovered a vast and significant natural and cultural heritage in the county. However the majority of people in the county are not aware of the dept and importance of Laois's heritage, would you agree? Could this ignorance, if I may call it so, be related to the fact that Laois's heritage has remained buried in books until recently?
4. Much of Laois's heritage is today either being restored, for example Ballaghmore Castle and Emo Court, or brought to life in visual displays, at Donaghmore Workhouse Museum and Abbeyleix's Heritage House. In your opinion, how important is this visualisation of heritage to the success of tourism in Laois?  
Do you have any problems with packaging and selling our heritage for tourists?
5. Has it been difficult to stimulate local peoples' interest in tourism development in Laois? How can these people benefit from the development of Laois tourism?
6. What are the main attributes of Laois's landscape for tourism?
7. Does Laois need to improve its national image of a boring midland county void of any visitor attractions and adequate accomodation, with bad roads and poor signposting? Is this already being tackled? If so, how?
8. In your opinion what are the remaining obstacles for Laois tourism reaching its potential? Do you have any fears for local lifestyles or the environment when this potential is reached?

## APPENDIX FIVE :

Interviewee: Henry Fingleton, Proprietor of Kilyahan Caravans Co. Laois.

1. How did you become involved in tourism? Could you tell me about your business?
2. What are the main organisations, agencies, and programmes that have assisted you? How have they assisted you?
3. Given that Laois tourism is not as developed as other counties, do you think that a unique thematic approach to developing Laois's tourism products is advisable?
4. Is there a need to visually enhance the landscape of Laois?
5. Do you think it is important to display the heritage of Laois visually to tourists rather than through books.
6. Does the national image of Laois need to be (a) improved and (b) publicised more.
7. What role do local people have to play and how will they benefit from tourism in Laois?
8. What in your opinion are the remaining obstacles to developing a successful tourism sector in Laois?
9. Do you anticipate any adverse effects from tourism in Laois, for example on the environment or on local culture?



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# A guide to Laois County

<http://www.laois.ie>

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Produced by "The Laois Nationalist"



**Farren Hostel**  
 BALEACOLLA  
 Tel: 0502-34032



**Hibernian Hotel**  
 ABBEYLEIX  
 Tel: 0502-31252



**Castle Arms Hotel**  
 Tel: 0502-36117



**The Foodhall**  
 PORTLAOISE  
 Tel: 0502-32616



**Mary's Bar**  
 FOXROCK INN, CLOUGH  
 Tel: 0502-38637



**Sensory Gardens**  
 ABBEYLEIX  
 Tel: 0502-31323



**Miller's Hardware**  
 PORTLAOISE  
 Tel: 0502-21445



**Woodview**  
 DURROW  
 Tel: 0502-36433



**The Gandon Inn**  
 EMO, PORTLAOISE  
 Tel: 0502-26533

THE HEART OF THE MIDLANDS

# Laois Tourism Member's Guide

## HOTELS

<b>Hibernian Hotel</b> Lower Main St, Abbeyleix	.0502 31252
<b>Castle Arms Hotel</b> Durrow	.0502 36117
<b>The Killleshin Hotel</b> Dublin Rd, Portlaoise	.0502 21663
<b>The Montague Hotel</b> Emo, Portlaoise	.0502 26154

## B & B ACCOMMODATION

<b>Allison Dowling</b> Preston House, Main Street, Abbeyleix	.0502 31432
<b>Maureen Lalor</b> Cois Na Tine, Portlaoise Rd, Abbeyleix	.0502 31976
<b>Brigid Lawlor</b> "Norfield House", The Old Town, Abbeyleix	.050231059
<b>Olive Bailey</b> Ballygogue Country House, Ballacolla, Co Laois	.0502 34025
<b>Sean Hyland</b> Foxrock Inn, Clough, Ballacolla, Co Laois	.0502 38637
<b>Janet Dooley</b> Lanley House, Mountsalem, Coolrain, Portlaoise	.0502 35013
<b>Sean Murphy</b> Woodview Restaurant, Durrow	.0502 36433
<b>Abigail McEvoy</b> Garoon House, Birr Rd, Mountmellick	.0502 24641
<b>Joan Bennett</b> Beech Hills Lodge, Moher West, Mountrath	.0502 35097
<b>Noreen Murphy</b> Conlan House, Killanure, Mountrath	.0502 32727
<b>Fiona Wallis</b> The Lodge, Coote Tec, Mountrath	.0502 32756
<b>Frank &amp; Rosemarie Kennan</b> Roundwood House, Mountrath	.0502 32120
<b>Audrey Canavan</b> "Chez Nous", Kilminchy, Portlaoise	.0502 21251
<b>Carrie Crean</b> Crean's Vicarstown Inn, Vicarstown, Co Laois	.0502 25189
<b>Marion Clancy</b> Aughnahilla House, Rock Of Dunamase, Portlaoise	.0502 25589
<b>Vera Hade</b> Renard, Limerick Road, Portlaoise	.0502 21735
<b>Noreen Llewellyn</b> "Aspen", Rock Of Dunamase, Portlaoise	.0502 25405
<b>Kathleen Moore</b> Morette Lodge, Emo, Portlaoise	.0502 46789
<b>Mary Murphy</b> "Oakville", Mountrath Rd, Portlaoise	.0502 61970
<b>Dermot O'Sullivan</b> 8 Kellyville Park, Portlaoise	.0502 22774
<b>Lily Saunders</b> "Rosedene", Limerick Rd, Portlaoise	.0502 22345
<b>Caroline Farrell</b> Tullamoy House, Stradbally	.0507 27111
<b>Pauleen McEvoy</b> The Court, Main St, Stradbally	.0502 25519

## FARMHOUSE ACCOMMODATION

<b>Bernadine Mulhall</b> Coolanowie, Ballikmoy, Co Laois	.0507 25176
<b>Carole England</b> Ballaghmore House, Ballaghmore, Borris-In-Ossory, Co Laois	.0505 21366
<b>Molra Phelan</b> Castletown House, Donaghmore, Co Laois	.0505 46415
<b>Bridget Cushen</b> Park House, Stradbally, Portlaoise	.0502 25147
<b>Breda Mulhall</b> Woodgrove Farm, Emo, Portlaoise	.0502 26324

## HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION

<b>Martin Phelan Traditional Farm Hostel</b> Farren Hostel, Ballacolla, Co Laois	.0502 34032
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## SELF-CATERING ACCOMMODATION

<b>Anne Seale</b> Shanahoe House, Abbeyleix	.0502 39625
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<b>Sharon Wallace</b> Granstown Manor, Granstown, Ballacolla, Co Laois	.0502 34002
<b>Bernadine Mulhall</b> Coolanowie, Ballikmoy, Co Laois	.0507 25176
<b>Maura Sheeran</b> Coolrain, Portlaoise	.0502 35126
<b>Tony Lynch</b> "Sheane House" 1 Park Tec., Irish Town, Mountmellick	.0502 24919
<b>Maura Behan</b> Kilmullin House, Portarlinton, Co Laois	.0502 23401
<b>Julle Booth</b> Coolbanagher, Emo, Portlaoise	.0502 46530
<b>June Davis</b> "Mt John", Ballybrittas, Portlaoise	.0502 26133
<b>Mary-Anne Delaney</b> The Ossory, Main St, Rathdowney, Co Laois	.0505 46534
<b>Carrie Crean</b> Crean's Vicarstown Inn, Vicarstown, Co Laois	.0502 25189

## BANKS

<b>AIB Bank</b> Lyster Square, Portlaoise	.0502 21349
<b>Bank of Ireland</b> Main Street, Portlaoise	.0502 21414

## CAFES

<b>Heritage House</b> Abbeyleix, Co Laois	.0502 31653
<b>Woodview Restaurant</b> Durrow, Co Laois	.0502 36433
<b>Kelton's Bakery</b> Kelton House, Portlaoise	.0502 21241

## GOLF CLUBS

<b>Mountrath Golf Club</b> Knockining, Mountrath	.0502 32421/32558
<b>Portarlinton Golf Club</b> Garryhinch, Portarlinton	.0502 23115
<b>Eske Hills Golf Club</b> Ballykilmurray, Tullamore, Co Offaly	.0506 55999
<b>Castle Barna Golf Club</b> Daingean, Tullamore, Co Offaly	.0506 53384
<b>Carlow Golf Range</b> Leighlin Road, Crossneen, Co Carlow	.0503 41683

## BUS FARE

<b>Oliver Conroy</b> Moneyquid, Killeigh, Co Laois	.0506 54208
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## GARDENS

<b>Joe's Garden and Pet Corner</b> Emo, Portlaoise	.0502 46586
<b>Gash Garden</b> Castletown, Portlaoise	.0502 32247

## HORSE RIDING

<b>Kerr Equestrian Activities</b> Cremorgan, Timahoe, Portlaoise	.0502 27162
<b>Portlaoise Equestrian Centre</b> Timahoe Road, Portlaoise	.0502 60880

## PUBS

<b>Treacy's</b> The Heath, Portlaoise	.0502 46539
<b>Mary's Bar</b> Clough, Ballacolla, Co Laois	.0502 38637
<b>Fallon's Pub</b> Main Street, Clonaslee, Co Laois	.0502 28019
<b>The Thatched Village Inn</b> Coolrain, Co Laois	.0502 35126
<b>Eammon A Chonic</b> Raheen, Abbeyleix, Co Laois	.0502 31109
<b>Maloney's Gaelic Bar</b> Patrick St, Mountmellick, Co Laois	.0502 24021
<b>Keegan's Pub</b> Lower Main Street, Portlaoise	.0502 21166
<b>Vicarstown Inn</b> Vicarstown, Co Laois	.0502 25189
<b>Hibernian Hotel</b> Main St, Abbeyleix, Co Laois	.0502 31252
<b>Castle Arms Hotel</b> Durrow, Co Laois	.0502 36117
<b>Killleshin Hotel</b> Dublin Rd, Portlaoise	.0502 21663
<b>Montague Hotel</b> Emo, Portlaoise	.0502 26154
<b>ANCHOR INN</b> Vicarstown, Co Laois	.0502 25252

## ANGLING

<b>Granstown Lane Dev. Co. Ltd.</b> Matt Doyle, Granstown, Co Laois	.0502 34125
<b>FLY FISHING SCHOOL AND GUIDE</b> Tanguy de Toulgoet Moyné Estate, West Hall Stables, Durrow, Co Laois	.0502 36578
<b>Angling Permits</b> <b>Tom Watkins</b> 6 St Fintans Park, Mountrath	.0502 32540

## ATTRACTIONS

<b>Heritage House</b> Abbeyleix, Co Laois	.0502 46212
<b>Donaghmore Workhouse Museum</b> Donaghmore, Co Laois	.0505 46212

## SHOPS

<b>Conroy's Shop</b> Roundwood, Mountrath, Co Laois	.0502 32156
<b>Dowling's Butchers</b> O'Moore St, Mountmellick	.0502 24245
<b>Dunne's Hardware Store</b> Mountrath Rd, Abbeyleix	.0502 31440
<b>Harrison's Shop</b> Court Square, Stradbally	.0502 25359
<b>Ballybrittas Food Store</b> Ballybrittas, Co Laois	
<b>Portarlinton Food Store</b> Portarlinton, Co Laois	

## OTHER GROUPS

<b>Laois Film Society</b> The Cinema, Mountmellick	.0502 44299
<b>The Four Parishes Community Group</b> The Heath, Portlaoise, Co Laois	.0502 46541
<b>Clonaslee Community Group</b> Ballykaneen, Clonaslee, Co Laois	.0502 28173
<b>Wolfhill Development Association</b> Kellystown Rd, Wolfhill, Co Laois	.0507 35594
<b>John Keys Transport Ltd</b> Ballydavis, Portlaoise	.0502 46525

## INDIVIDUALS

<b>Stephan Conroy</b> , Roundwood, Mountrath, Co Laois
<b>Andy Cole</b> , Main St, Abbeyleix, Co Laois
<b>Pat Corbet</b> , Ballykaneen, Clonaslee, Co Laois
<b>Bernie Keegan</b> , Lower Main St, Portlaoise, Co Laois
<b>Michael O'Brien</b> , Stradbally, Co Laois
<b>John Maloney T.D.</b> , Patrick Street, Mountmellick
<b>Geraldine Fenehan</b> , Vicarstown, Co Laois
<b>Tom Jacob</b> , Glenside, Portlaoise, Co Laois
<b>J D Aidiit</b> , Dublin Road, Portlaoise, Co Laois
<b>Anne Turley</b> , "Cristine", Portarlinton, Co Laois
<b>Marie McGrath</b> , Aughadreen, The Swan, Co Laois
<b>Mary White</b> , Lower Main St, Abbeyleix, Co Laois
<b>Mary Culliton</b> , Acragar House, Irishtown, Mountmellick, Co Laois
<b>John Jo Dunne</b> , Mountmellick, Co Laois
<b>Ada Deverill</b> , Abbeyleix, Co Laois
<b>Michael Dowling</b> , Derry, Camrosa, Co Laois
<b>Marlin Rohan</b> , MCC, Ballinakill, Co Laois
<b>Mary Wheatley</b> , MCC, Doonana, Crettyard, Co Laois
<b>Noreen Joyce</b> , The Square, Durrow, Co Laois
<b>Mary Knowles</b> , Kellystown Rd, Wolfhill, Co Laois
<b>Margaret Mullins</b> , Clonaslee, Co Laois.



Aghaboe Abbey.

# Chairman's Address

As chairman of Laois Tourism I must thank *The Laois Nationalist* and *Nationalist and Leinster Times* for their effort in promoting Laois. This publication will give every reader a chance to see how Laois is just a wonderful and friendly place to visit and stay and enjoy Laois and its people.



Mr. Martin Phelan

Laois has a lot to offer all tourists who visit our County from activities in walking, golf, fishing, touring and everything you find in Ireland except the sea. Over the vast number of years Laois Tourism has worked hard to promote and provide a better place and holiday for everybody which will visit Laois.

Tourism provides jobs not only to the direct tourism provider but everybody Hardware Shops, Pubs, Builders, Food Retailers etc., etc.

I would like to thank Laois County Council, F.A.S., Midland East Tourism, Bord Fáilte Coillte, Teagasc, Laois Leader, Laois County Enterprise Board, Abbeyleix Heritage Company, Tidy Towns, OPW, a very strong Laois Tourism committee and Laois Community Network for all their hard work and help over the years.

Marketing Laois is most important. We have been to Dublin, Cork, Shannon, Birmingham, London, Belfast, Amsterdam, Helsinki, Gothenburg, as well as all local shows and we intend to keep up this type of marketing.

Ms. Orlagh Brady, our Marketing Development Officer, has been very important to the Laois Tourism and she can be contacted at Heritage House, Abbeyleix at (0502) 30143, to help anybody interested in any of the many tourist activities.

Laois is just the perfect location to spend your holiday or to have a conference. You have a very good train service to Portlaoise and Portarlinton, Ballybrophy and a good road network from all parts of Ireland. We have excellent hotels, guest houses, B&B's and hostels. We have the best of restaurants, Abbeyleix Heritage Town and the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Grantstown Lake, Donaghmore Famine Museum and our many developed walks and bogs make Laois a great place to visit and stay.

Laois Tourism have many members which I thank for their support and we hope to have many more, and that all tourist providers will join Laois Tourism. This way we can be even a stronger organisation to benefit all of County Laois.

**Mr. Martin J. Phelan, M.C.C.**  
**Chairman Laois Tourism Committee.**

**DISCLAIMER:** Every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy in the compilation of this brochure. Laois Tourism Co. Ltd. or the *Nationalist* publications cannot, however, accept responsibility for errors or omissions but where such are brought to our attention, future publications will be amended accordingly.

Editorial: Orlagh Brady.  
Commercial sales: Gemma Higgins & Karen Keating  
Front cover: John Reddy  
Photographs by: Alf Harvey  
Layout and design: Production staff, Nationalist Ltd.

## INFORMATION POINTS

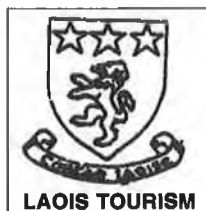
Along with the Tourist Information Office at James Fintan Lawlor Avenue, Portlaoise, Co Laois 0502 21178 There are three other information points in the County  
**Abbeyleix Heritage House, Abbeyleix, Co Laois. TEL: 0502 31653**

**Moutmellick Development Association, Moutmellick, Irishtown, Moutmellick, Co Laois. TEL: 0502 24525**

**The Slieve Bloom Rural Development Association**  
The Community Centre, Kinnitty, Co Offaly. TEL: 0509 37299

## Laois Tourism Committee

**Martin Phelan, Chairman.**  
**Mary Culliton, Secretary.**  
**Sean O'Reilly, Kathleen Moore, Treasurers.**  
**Tom Jacob, Tom Treacy, Matt Doyle, Moira Phelan, Andy Cole, Seosamh Murphy, Marie Christie, Tom O'Brien, Orlagh Brady, Niall Callaly, Jim Crean (committee).**



# History ...

Laois Tourism was founded in 1987 to develop tourism in the county and to promote tourism both at home and on the overseas markets. Laois Tourism have participated at Holiday Fairs in Dublin, Cork, Belfast, London, Manchester and Birmingham. For the last three years it has gone further afield to Gothenburg and Helsinki.

Laois with its central location is a perfect base to explore the many heritage, cultural and monastic sites in the County. Visit the historic and heritage sites which include The Rock of Dunamase, Heritage House Abbeyleix, Emo Court, Ballyfin House, Aghaboe Abbey, Killeshin Romanesque Doorway, Timahoe Round Tower, Ballaghmore Castle, Donaghmore Workhouse Museum, The Swallows Quarter, Donaghmore.

Gardens include Gash gardens, Castletown, Heywood gardens, Ballinakill, Emo Court and gardens, Joe's garden and pet corner and Abbeyleix Sensory Gardens.

Excellent fishing is found on the Nore, Barrow and Figle rivers the Erkina, Grand Canal at Vicarstown, Ballyfin Lake, Grantstown Lake, Ballinakill Lakes, Templemore Lake, Ballaghmore Lake and Little Bog Lake at the Heath.

Laois is a golfer's paradise with an impressive variety of golfing facilities for all enthusiasts with 18 hole courses at The Heath, Mountrath, Portarlinton, Rathdowney a 9 hole course at Abbeyleix and a PAR 3 in Portlaoise.

Enjoy the rural tranquillity of County Laois there is so much to see and so much to do. It is a walkers and cyclists paradise. Discover the secrets of the Slieve Blooms with their beautiful glens, waterfalls, nature trails, wooded areas and rivers.

Entertainment for the visitor is varied and includes traditional Irish music sessions in many of the pubs and hotels.

The people of the County are warm and welcoming and whether you have a special interest or simply wish to enjoy yourself you will find so many eager to help you and show you Laois and its attractions.

Laois Tourism would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of FAS, Abbeyleix Heritage Company Ltd, Laois County Council, Laois LEADER Rural Development Co., Laois County Enterprise Board, METRO, Local media and Laois Community Network.

*A special word of thanks to Alf Harvey for his work on the photography for this publication.*

# SERVICES

## SWIMMING

<b>Portarlington Swimming Pool</b>	
Portarlington .....	.0502 23149
<b>Portlaoise Swimming Pool</b>	
Portlaoise .....	.0502 21710
<b>Graigucullen Swimming Pool</b>	
Graigucullen, Co Laois .....	.0503 40330
<b>Ballinakill Swimming Pool</b>	
Ballinakill, Co Laois.	

## HORSE RIDING

<b>Portlaoise Equestrian Centre</b>	
Timahoe Rd, Portlaoise .....	.0502 60880.
<b>Tom Kerr</b>	
Cremorgan, Timahoe .....	.0502 27162

## TAXI'S

<b>John Jo Tynan</b>	
68 Main Street, Portlaoise .....	.086 675642
<b>Mr. Joe Whelan</b>	
25 Carrickhill, Portlaoise .....	.0502 60684
<b>Tom Cleary</b>	
37 Lakeglen, Portlaoise .....	.087 627667
<b>Martin Meeney</b>	
33 Lakeglen, Portlaoise .....	.087 2398477
<b>Donal Ryan</b>	
St. Brigid Place, Portlaoise .....	.0502 62100
<b>John Galvin</b>	
25 Lakeglen, Portlaoise .....	.087 2557799
<b>Jim Thompson</b>	
11 Liogard, Portlaoise .....	.0502 61908
<b>Michael O'Callaghan</b>	
10 New Park, Portlaoise .....	.087 266122
<b>Hugh Callaghan</b>	
10 New Park, Portlaoise .....	.086 8120000

## OPEN FARM

<b>Castletown House Open Farm,</b>	
Donaghmore, Co Laois .....	.0505-46415

## OPEN GARDENS

<b>The Sensory Gardens,</b>	
Main St, Abbeyleix .....	.0502-31325
<b>Heywood Gardens,</b>	
Ballinakill .....	.0502-33563
<b>Emo Gardens,</b>	
Emo, Portlaoise .....	.0502-26573
<b>Gash Gardens,</b>	
Castletown .....	.0502-32247
<b>Joe's Garden,</b>	
Emo, Portlaoise .....	.0502-46586

## BIKES FOR HIRE

<b>Mark Sheeran,</b>	
Coolrain, Co. Laois.	0502-35126

## ASSOCIATIONS

<b>The Carers Associations,</b>	5 Coote St. Portlaoise	.0502 61112
<b>Laois Teachers Centre,</b>	Bridge St. Centre, Bridge St.	
	Portlaoise .....	.0502 61170
<b>Laois G A A,</b>	O'Moore Park Portlaoise	.0502 22272
<b>Mountmellick Employment Group,</b>	Mountmellick	.0502 44150
<b>Laois Rugby Clubs</b>		

## GOLF CLUBS AND COURSES

<b>Abbeyleix Golf Course,</b>	
Ballyroan Rd, Abbeyleix .....	.0502-31450
<b>The Heath Golf Club,</b>	
The Heath, Portlaoise .....	.0502-46533
<b>Portarlington Golf Club,</b>	
Garryhinch, Portarlington .....	.0502-23115
<b>Portlaoise PAR 3,</b>	
Cork Rd, Portlaoise .....	.0502-61557
<b>Mountrath Golf Club,</b>	
Knockning, Mountrath .....	.0502-32558
<b>Rathdowney Golf Club,</b>	
Rathdowney .....	.0505 -46205
<b>Carlow Golf Range,</b>	
Leighlin Road, Crossneen, Co Carlow .....	.0503-41683
<b>Castle Barna Golf Club,</b>	
Daingean, Tullamore, Co Offaly .....	.0506-53384
<b>Esker Hills Golf &amp; Country Club,</b>	
Ballykilmurray, Tullamore .....	.0506-55999

## HEALTH AND FITNESS

<b>Maltings Fitness and Raquet Club,</b>	
Ballyfin Rd, Portlaoise .....	.0502-21216

## SERVICES

<b>Abbeyleix Library,</b>	Main St., Abbeyleix	.0502 30020
<b>Portlaoise Library,</b>	Dunamase Hse, Portlaoise	.0502 22333
<b>Laois Education Supplies,</b>	JFL Ave, the Bookshop,	
Portlaoise .....		.0502 20466
<b>Laois Farm Relief Services,</b>		
Old Abbeyleix Rd, Portlaoise .....		.0502 61916
<b>Laois Fire Protection,</b>	Stradbally	.0502 25337
<b>Laois Hire Services,</b>	Abbeyleix Rd, Portlaoise	.0502 21138
<b>Laois Hospice Bereavement Service,</b>		
Knockmay, Portlaoise .....		.0502 60984
<b>Laois Hunt, Hunt Club,</b>	Beechfield, Abbeyleix	.0502 31265
<b>Laois Money Advice and Budgeting Service,</b>		
25, Church St. Portlaoise .....		.0502 61727
<b>Laois VEC Community Employment,</b>		
Vocational School, Abbeyleix .....		.0502 30004
<b>Laois Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals</b>		
Laburnan lodge, Abbeyleix .....		.0502 31241
<b>Garda Station</b>		
Portlaoise, Co. Laois .....		.0502 21253

## BANKS AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

<b>ACC Bank,</b>	Kellyville House, Portlaoise	.0502 21518
<b>AIB Bank,</b>	The Square, Abbeyleix	.0502 31136
<b>AIB Bank,</b>	The Square, Mountmellick	.0502 24456
<b>AIB Bank,</b>	Mountrath	.0502 32228
<b>AIB Bank,</b>	Portarlington	.0502 23119
<b>AIB Bank,</b>	Lyster Sq., Portlaoise	.0502 21349
<b>AIB Bank,</b>	The Sq., Rathdowney	.0505 46102
<b>Ulster Bank,</b>	Laois Shopping Centre, Portlaoise	.0502 60733
<b>Bank of Ireland,</b>	Durrow	.0502 36143
<b>Bank of Ireland,</b>	Mountrath	.0502 32216
<b>Bank of Ireland,</b>	Portarlington	.0502 23165
<b>Bank of Ireland,</b>	Main St., Portlaoise	.0502 21414
<b>Bank of Ireland,</b>	The Sq., Rathdowney	.0505 46313
<b>Bank of Ireland,</b>	Main St., Abbeyleix	.0502 31212
<b>Irish Permanent,</b>	Main St., Portlaoise	.0502 21739
<b>Irish Permanent,</b>	Main St., Portarlington	.0502 23349
<b>TSB,</b>	Main St., Portlaoise	.0502 20377
<b>EBS,</b>	Main St. Portlaoise	.0502 21856
<b>EBS,</b>	Sarsfields St., Mountmellick	.0502 24181
<b>Irish Nationwide,</b>	Main St., Portlaoise	.0502 20355
<b>First National Bulding Society,</b>	9 Lyster Lane,	
Shopping Centre, Portlaoise .....		.0502 21773



*Laois is famous for its beautiful scenery, its colourful villages and its friendly people. A visit to Laois is guaranteed to please the most discerning visitor. But there is more to Laois than meets the eye. There's also plenty to do. We hope that this Calendar of Events demonstrates the Laois is the 'happening' place to be.*

# Laois Tourism Calendar of Events '98

**Every Sunday in the summer months (weather permitting): Uiseann Park, Rossmore, Killeshin, Co. Laois 3pm - 6pm Open air music and dancing. Teas and home baking available.**

## JUNE

- 0 - 1:** Jazz Festival  
Venue: Portlaoise town  
Contact: Portlaoise Tourist Office 0502 21178
- 7:** 1798 Commemoration  
Venue: Mountmellick, Co. Laois  
Contact: Mountmellick Development Association, 0502 24525
- :** Guided Walk  
Venue: Clear Lake  
Assemble: Laois County boundary sign Kinnitty, Mountrath Rd.  
Leader: E. Spain  
Time: 3 pm for 3 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 4:** Guided Walk  
Venue: Brandon Hill, Kilkenny  
Assemble: Bus - Contact Joan Roche before the 10/6/98  
Bus fare applies  
Leader: P. Culleton  
Time: 9 am for 5 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 10:** Dunamase Riding Club Midsummer Show  
Venue: Shanahoe House, Abbeyleix, Co Laois  
Contact: Anne Seale, 0502 39625
- 11:** Guided Walk  
Venue: Slieve Bloom Marathon  
Assemble: Leap Castle  
Leader: G Hanlon, P Culleton & R Jack  
Time: 8 am for 12 hours (22 miles)  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 1:** Guided Walk  
Venue: Slieve Bloom Mini Marathon  
Assemble: Leap Castle  
Leader: M. McGrath  
Time: 11.30 am for 7 hours (11 miles)  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 7:** Knitted Village  
Venue: Durrow  
Contact: Aras An Chontae - 0502 22044
- 8:** Guided Walk  
Venue: Conlawn Hill  
Assemble: Entrance gates Ballyfin College  
Leader: D. McCormack & A. O' Flynn

Time: 3 pm for 2 and a half hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299

## JULY

- 5:** Guided Walk  
Venue: Troopers Quarry  
Assemble: Clonaslee Community Centre  
Leader: G. Hanlon  
Time: 3 pm for 3 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 6 - 10:** Laois County Council, Summer Drama Workshop  
Venue: GAA Hall, Portarlinton  
Contact: Aras An Chontae - 0502 22044
- 6 - 10:** Laois County Council, Summer Art Workshop  
Venue: Durrow National School  
Contact: Aras An Chontae - 0502 22044
- 12:** Portlaoise Rugby Club Casino Night.  
Contact: Portlaoise Rugby Club
- 12:** Guided Walk  
Venue: Hugh O'Neill's Well  
Assemble: Monicknew  
Leader: N. Uí Laighin  
Time: 3 pm for 3 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 13 - 17:** Laois County Council, Summer Drama Workshop  
Venue: Durrow National School  
Contact: Aras An Chontae - 0502 22044
- 13 - 17:** Laois County Council, Summer Art Workshop  
Venue: Clonaghadoo National School  
Contact: Aras An Chontae - 0502 22044
- 17 - 19:** Festival Francais De Portarlinton  
Venue: Portarlinton  
Contact: Mary Foy 0502 23651
- 19:** Guided Walk  
Venue: Well Of Slieve Bloom  
Assemble: The Cut car park.

### Tangles Hair Studio

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Saturday - 9.00 - 6.00

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O.A.P. rates Tuesday only



The memorial to the Second Viscount Vespi, Abbeyleix.

- Leader: G. Hanlon  
Time: 3 pm for 3 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 19: Ossory Show  
Venue: Rathdowney, Co. Laois  
Contact: Martin Phelan - 0502 34032  
Time: 10 am - 6 pm
- 20 - 31: Exhibition - The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland: 'Irish Architecture Awards' display at Heritage House, Abbeyleix  
Contact: Dermot Mulligan 0502 31653
- 20 - 24: Laois County Council, Summer Drama Workshop  
Venue: COI Parochial Hall, Portlaoise  
Contact: Aras An Chontae - 0502 22044
- 20 - 24: Laois County Council, Summer Art Workshop  
Venue: C.O.I. Hall, Rathdowney  
Contact: Aras An Chontae - 0502 22044
- 20 - 24: Durrow Carnival, The Sq., Durrow.  
Contact G. Irwin, 0502 36600
- 25: Feile lá na Blathanna - Stradbally  
Contact: Dominic Hartnett - 0502 25559  
Venue: Stradbally
- 26: The Noel Duggan Memorial Vintage and Classic Show  
Venue: The Square, Ballinakill, Co Laois  
Contact: Aidan Kennedy - 0502 -33331  
Time: 2 pm
- 26: Donkey Derby Day  
Venue: Camross, Co Laois  
Contact: Fr. Lalor, 0502 35122
- 26: Flare in the Square  
Venue: Rathdowney, Co Laois  
Contact: Michael Creagh, 0505 46207
- 26: Guided Walk  
Venue: Arderin  
Assemble: Glenkitt (Srahane Outdoor pursuit centre)  
Leader: E. Spain  
Time: 3 pm for 3 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 27 - 31: Laois County Council, Summer Drama Workshop  
Venue: Scoil Aongusa, Stradbally  
Contact: Aras An Chontae - 0502 22044
- 27 - 31: Laois County Council, Summer Art Workshop  
Venue: Scouts Den, Portlaoise  
Contact: Aras An Chontae - 0502 22044  
Launch of the Sli Na Sláinte Ballyroan Walk  
Venue: The Band Stand, Ballyroan, Co. Laois  
Contact: Ber McWey - 0502 27146

- 31 - 6: Slieve Bloom Fraughan Festival  
Venue: Castletown Community Centre, Co. Laois (Dance Workshop)  
Sheeran's Thatched Pub, Coolrain, Co Laois  
Contact: Michael Lalor, 086 - 2607658
- 2: Guided Walk  
Venue: Wolf Trap mountain  
Assemble: The Cut Car Park  
Leader: M. McGrath  
Time: 3 pm for 3 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 2 - 3: National Traction Engine Steam Rally  
Venue: Stradbally, Co. Laois  
Contact: Eite Kennedy - 0502 25444  
Time: 9 am until evening
- 8: Guided Walk  
Venue: Kinnitty Woodland Walk  
Assemble: Kinnitty Castle  
Leader: P. Lowry  
Time: 3 pm for 2 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 15: Guided Walk  
Venue: Carrauntoohill  
Assemble: Bus - Contact Joan Roche Before 7/8/98  
Leader: P. Culleton  
Time: 8 to 10 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 22 - 23: The Montague Stages Car Rally  
Venue: Starting at the Montague Hotel  
Contact: Jim Dylan 01 840 3070 or The Montague Hotel 0502 26154
- 23: Guided Walk  
Venue: Ricketts Rocks  
Assemble: Clonaslee Heritage Centre  
Leader: M. Dunne  
Time: 3 pm for 2 and a half hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 30: Abbeyleix Food Fair  
Venue: Heritage House, Abbeyleix, Co Laois  
Contact: Blainaid Bergin - 0502 31514  
Time: 11 am - 5 pm
- 30: Guided Walk  
Venue: Brittas & Glenkeen  
Assemble: Clonaslee Heritage Centre  
Leader: R. Jack  
Time: 3 pm for 3 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 30: The All Ireland National Vintage Rally  
Venue: Ballyroan, Co. Laois  
Contact:

## SEPTEMBER

- 6: National Heritage Day  
Various activities organised around the county.
- 6: The Clonaslee Show  
Venue: Community Centre Clonaslee  
Contact: Pat Corbert - 0502 28173



Countryside scene at Emo Court.

## COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LAOISE LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL



### Our Mission

Our Mission is to develop, promote and protect the physical, social, economic and cultural environment of the County in participation with and in the best interests of the customers we serve.

**Louis Brennan**  
County Secretary

**Laois County Council**  
County Hall,  
Portlaoise

Phone: (0502) 22044  
Fax: (0502) 22313

**LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL**  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE OF LAOIS

- 6: Guided Walk  
Venue: Stoneyman  
Assemble: Ridge of Capard Car Park  
Leader: M Clear & N Graham  
Time: 2 pm for 2 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 13: Guided Walk  
Venue: Cadamstown and Spink  
Assemble: Cadamstown Car Park  
Leader: J. Elliffe  
Time: 2 pm for 3 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 26-27: National Inter School Show Jumping Championships  
Venue: Equestrian Centre, Portlaoise, Co Laois  
Time: 9 am - 7 pm  
Contact: Ronan Sheehan - 0502 60880
- 27: Guided Walk  
Venue: Cadamstown  
Assemble: Cadamstown Car Park  
Leader: P. Hearney  
Time: 2 pm for 2 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299

## OCTOBER

- 3: Guided Walk  
Venue: Royal Canal  
Assemble: Bus - Contact Joan Roche before 1/10/98  
Bus fare applies  
Leader: R. Jack  
Time: 9 am for 6 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 09-11: O Lator Clan Rally  
Venue: Montague Hotel, Erno, Co. Laois  
Contact: Mary Lalor -0502 46541
- 11: Guided Walk  
Venue: Brockagh  
Assemble: Monicknew  
Leader: N. Ui Laighin  
Time: 2 pm for 2 and a half hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 18: Guided Walk  
Venue: Beama Bui  
Assemble: Ballaghmore Church Car Park  
Leader: P. T eehan  
Time: 2 pm for 3 hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 23: Faight Sessions and Sets  
Venue: Sheeran's Village Inn, Coolrain, Co Laois  
Contact: Michael O Lator - 086 2607658
- 24: Set Dance Workshop  
Venue: Sheeran's Village Inn, Coolrain, Co Laois  
Contact: Michael O Lator - 086 2607658



Quakers Graveyard, Rosenallis.

- 24: Ceili  
Venue: Castletown Community Centre  
Contact: Michael O Lator - 086 2607658  
Time: 10 pm - 2 am
- 24-24: Lisdoonvama Reunion  
Castle Arms Hotel, Durrow
- 25: Guided Walk  
Venue: Spooky Walk  
Assemble: Kinnitty Castle  
Leader: R. Jack and McGrath  
Time: 6 pm for 1 and a half hours  
Contact: Slieve Bloom Rural Development Society Walking Club  
Phone: 0509 37247 or 0509 37299
- 26: Workshop with William Hammond  
Venue: Castletown Community Centre  
Contact: Michael O Lator - 086 2607658  
Time: 11 am - 1 pm
- 25: Ceili  
Venue: Castletown Community Centre  
Contact: Michael O Lator - 086 2607658  
Time: 2.30 pm - 5.30 pm
- 25: Sessions and Sets  
Venue: Sheeran's Village Inn, Coolrain, Co. Laois  
Contact: Michael O Lator - 086 2607658  
Time: 8 pm until close
- 25: Evening Ceili  
Venue: Castletown Community Centre, Co Laois  
Contact: Michael O Lator - 086 2607658  
Time: 10 pm - 2 am
- 26: Guided Hill Walk  
Venue: Slieve Bloom Mountains  
Contact: Michael O Lator - 086 2607658
- 26: Afternoon session and sets  
Venue: Sheeran's Village Inn, Coolrain, Co Laois  
Contact: Michael O Lator - 086 2607658  
Time: 3.30 pm onwards.

## DECEMBER

- 16: The Christmas Craft Fair. Venue: The Killeshin Hotel. Contact: LACA 502 62501.

<b>LEADER III</b>		<p><b>LAOIS LEADER, SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING OF TOURISM IN COUNTY LAOIS.</b></p>
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Email: llrdc@iol.ie

# Suggested driving Excursions

## ALL THREE TOURS WILL START IN THE HERITAGE TOWN OF ABBEYLEIX

### "Slieve Margy Tour"

#### ABBEYLEIX

The elegant heritage town of Abbeyleix centred around the spacious main street is an example of 18th century town planning by the second Viscount de Vesci. Two de Vesci fountain memorials are located in the town. Places of interest include Heritage House which once housed a Patrician Monastery and a boys' school as well as the splendid architecture of the town's churches, South School, the Bank of Ireland, Pembroke Terrace, Knocknamoe, Market and Station Houses and old shop fronts. A particular attraction is Morissey's Public House that ranks 6th of the "twenty best pubs in the world". Although located on the main Dublin/ Cork road, Abbeyleix offers many tranquil country delights such as the 'Lord's Walk', fishing along the River

Nore and a Sensory Garden.

#### DURROW

Durrow once belonged to the Fitzpatricks, Lords of Upper Ossory but was incorporated into Kilkenny by an Act of Parliament in the 16th Century. It was ruled by the Earls of Ormond until its return to County Laois in 1845.

Durrow features a fort granted



● Emo Court.

by charter in 1245 with a fine suite of buildings around the village green under the gates and battlement wall. In the 13th Century, Markets were held there regularly.

Castle Durrow House can be traced back to Captain Flower who had come to Ireland to con-

solidate the spoils of the battle of Kinsale in 1603. In 1659, 11 Protestant and 94 Catholic families lived under the patronage of Castle Durrow. The actual building of what is one of the first and finest Palladian mansions in Ireland, took place between 1716 and 1718. About 1850, a new wing replaced the side building and a portland stone stairway and

the first half of this century, and the broad main street reflects the important position the town once held. A monument in the square is dedicated to local men who died in the 1798 rebellion. The delightful Italian gardens at Heywood are located on the edge of the village. Ballinakill castle was built by Ridgeway. It was besieged and taken by the Confederate Catholics in 1641 under Fairfax after stout resistance by the Garrison.

#### WOLFHILL

An unexpected mountain setting gives church of Wolfhill a sense of a pilgrimage to a place apart. The essential simplicity of its luminous interior has been preserved in a recent restoration. On the outside the church seems like any other in Laois with its cut stone trimmings and rendered wall, while inside it is a building of marvellous spaciousness constructed from locally available raw materials. Until the 1920s, Wolfhill was an important coal mining area. Today the area offers a unique sense of solitude and serenity.

#### KILLESHTIN

Killeshtin is located in the Rossmore Hills from which some of the loveliest sights in Leinster can be enjoyed. The coal mines which were the main source of employment for over 200 years are now silent. Between the hills of Keeloge and Cracknaraw, in the Slieve Margy range, we find a picturesque glen which was called in ancient times "glen Ushin". At the mouth of this glen are the ruins of Killeshtin Church, a splendid example of Hiberno-Romanesque architecture. The monastery was founded here in the year 545 AD. The famous western doorway bears an inscription asking for "A Prayer for Diarmait, King of Leinster" who died in 1117. Killeshtin was one of only two churchyards in Laois with a Round Tower. On the Northside of the churchyard a small stream from the glens enters a natural cave and eventually merges into the Fushogue river which flows into the Barrow.

stain glass window were added.

#### CULLAHILL

The serene village of Cullahill is an ideal backdrop for the magnificent 90ft tall and 48ft base Tower House. It dates roughly from 1425 and is believed to be the former residence of the MacGillapatricks of Upper Ossory. 100 yards from the Tower House stands the remains of the private chapel of the Catholic Lords of Upper Ossory. Cullahill Castle has not been lived in since 1677 and it is believed that no one has been buried in the chapel graveyard for a century and a half.

#### HEYWOOD GARDENS

The Gardens lie in what was the most admired demesne of Co. Laois at the end of the 18th Century. Although the house was destroyed by fire in 1960 the spectacular Italian Gardens can still be visited and the route is well signposted. The Gardens are one of four designed by Edward Luytens in Ireland and are magnificently located on a hillside. The centrepiece of the garden forms a fountain pool encircled by bronze turtles. Beautiful flower arrangements are sheltered by a circular wall with openings to allow breathtaking views of the local countryside.

#### BALLINAKILL

Ballinakill is a fine example of a 17th Century market town. The extensive square conjures up images of farming fairs held in

#### BALLYLYNAN

Ballylynan is an ancient townland centred on the present day village and a gateway to the beau-



**Leinster  
Council  
GAA**

ALWAYS ON THE BALL FOR  
LAOIS TOURISM

iful yet haunting area of Slieve Margy. It was historically located on the boundary between the O'Mores of Laois and the O'Brennans and O'Byrnes of Slieve Margy. In the Ballylunan area, the remains of a church can be found with a stone cased window at the western end a deeply played window to the eastern end. An earth-ware urn was found in the area in 1786 containing a great number of silver coins dating 862-870 inscribed "O'Laghis King" (the O'Mores) and "Dunamaise" on the obverse. With the final departure of the O'Mores during the reign of James 1, the Weldon Family who derived part of their wealth from the Castlecomer coalmines, purchased the townland and remained landlords until present times.

**BALLYADAMS**

Ballyadams Castle is situated in the Queen's County within three miles of Athy. The Castle known as the "House of Adam" was built by the O'More family on the site of a Norman Castle in the 15th Century. The remains of this magnificent building still give an ideal of its former impressive scale. During the plantation of the Queens County the castle was

granted along with a considerable estate to Welshman John Bowen know also as "Shane-a-feeke or "John of the Pike". A monument to the Bowens displaying miniature figures of family members can be seen in Ballyadams church. The church is about three or four hundred years old and features a sacranarium located at the Epistle side of the Altar. Close by is also a small lancet window in the southern wall.

**TIMAHOE**

The village community of Timahoe is beautifully situated in a board and fertile valley. The houses are built around a large central green commonly called the Goosegreen. A 12th century round tower standing 96ft high is located at the outskirts of the village. The monastic sights include an impressive Romanesque doorway. A monastic community existed in Timahoe until the late 1550's. The land remained with the Church of Fossey, now in ruins, until the suppression of the monasteries. Under the reign of Queen Elizabeth the lands were granted to Francis Cosby, Captain of the Queens Kern and Governor of Maryborough. Another attraction is the Town Castle built by Hugh de Lacy in 1189.



● Slieve Bloom Way.

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# "Slievebloom Tour"

**ABBEYLEIX** See page 8

## AGHABOE

The first church on the site of Aghaboe was founded by St. Canice in the 6th Century and became an important religious centre. During its eventful history, it was plundered in 913, re-built in 1052, burnt in 1160, re-built in 1234 and burnt again in 1346. The tower of the present Protestant church retains original 13th century portions. Decorative Stonework was removed from the church, which stands on the site of the former Augustinian church, to adorn a folly at Heywood House, Ballinakill in 1773. Aghaboe is also known as the birthplace of the geographer St. Fergal who founded Salzburg in Austria.

## DONAGHMORE MUSEUM

A workhouse museum presenting an eerie window on past workhouse conditions. Originally built as a workhouse, the museum has been restored by Avonmore. During the Great Famine it housed 1200 people who took refuge there. It is estimated that ten per cent of the local population were left destitute.

## BORRIS-IN-OSSORY

Borris-in-Ossory is a single street village roughly half a mile long. It features two churches and two former churches as well as a fine courthouse where the district sessions are held. It originated as a cluster around the castle of the Fitzpatrick's which was built in 1589. The village grew along the eighteenth century coach road and depended on the woollen trade. North of the village is Kyle of Chuain Ferta Molua, the site of a monastery founded by St. Lugaid of Molua whose work in Biblical Commentaries survives in manuscripts all over Europe.

## BALLAGHMORE

Ballaghmore Castle is well sign-posted just off the N7, midway between Roscrea and Borris-in-Ossary. This late 15th Century tower house of the Lords of Upper Ossary has been recently restored and furnished and is open daily not only for visitors but also for functions. A 'Sheila-na-Gig', a pagan fertility symbol to ward off evil is carved in stone on the front south facing wall. Nearby flows the River Nore famous for its fishing.

## CASTLETOWN

This picturesque Georgian village offers to its visitors both a warm welcome and sites of historical interest. A castle built here in

1182 by Hugh de Lacy became the centre of an important Norman Borough. Ruins of St. Coedus church still stand in the old cemetery at Churchtown, located beyond the western end of the village. In 1669 the church was already destroyed and mass was said in a mass pit near Daingeanacor. Also of interest is Gash Garden.

## MOUNTRATH

Mountrath dates from the 17th Century when Sir Charles Coote started to turn his new estate, which was covered in wild woodland, into an important centre for iron, brewing, cotton and farming. In 1641, extensive linen industries and other property were destroyed but Coote's son Charles regained the land and was given the title of Earl of Mountrath. In 1801, Mountrath had two distilleries, two breweries, a cotton spinning factory, an oil mill and an iron works which emphasises Mountrath's importance in past industry.

## CLONENAGH

A celebrated monastery was founded here by St. Fintan on a site situated about a mile from Mountrath. Tombs in the cemetery date from about 1700. Local tradition tells of the existence of seven churches which today have all disappeared. On the roadside stood a tree which had a cavity in its trunk where water was found. The so-called well of St. Fintan was believed to have healing properties ascribed to it.

## BALLYFIN

This captivating parish features Ballyfin House, one of Ireland's most magnificent houses built in the 19th Century for Sir Charles Coote to the designs of Dominic Madden and Sir Richard Morrison and son. The house is now owned by the Patrician Brothers and is currently under restoration. Another site of historical interest is the folly, a circular medieval tower surrounded by a moate and the College Conservatory by Turner.

## SLIEVE BLOOM

The Slieve Bloom mountains rise steeply from the surrounding plains covering an area of 600 square miles. An unforgettable view can be enjoyed from the top of its many summits. The area is a delight for walkers offering a range of tracks and paths in the numerous glens. The most famous walk is the 20 mile circular Slieve Bloom Way. The peaceful and picturesque glens are home to a wonderful oasis of flora, fauna and wildlife set in the

heart of the midlands.

## ROSENALLIS

The origins of this quaint village, Rosenallis, date back to at least early Christian. A parochial church was located there throughout the medieval period. Rosenallis grew as a village when it became a Quaker Colony and a linen centre. Places of interest include the Quaker Graveyard and the Church of Ireland Church.

## MOUNTMELICK

This busy town originated as a Quaker settlement, when the religious group arrived in 1657 under the leadership of William Edmundson, and features the first Quaker school in Ireland. Under the influence of the industrious Quakers the town grew into a thriving market town harbouring 27 industries including breweries, a distillery, woollen mills and a sugar beet factory which gave the town the name of "The Manchester of Ireland". The hanging of "Eleven Brave Men" for their part on the 1798 Rebellion is commemorated by a monument on the Clonaslee Road. Mountmellick's Christmas Tree is renowned for its size in Ireland.

# "DUNAMAISE TOUR"

**ABBEYLEIX** See Page 8  
**PORTLAOISE**

(formerly Maryborough)

Portlaoise grew out of the conflict between the O'Mores and the Tudors who advised the Irish chiefs to surrender unconditionally in order to guarantee their protection. However, the Tudors broke their word and subsequently built Portlaoise fort known at various times as Fort Protector and later Maryborough after Queen Mary in 1556.

Today Portlaoise offers its visitors many historical attractions as well as fine food and hospitality. Principle buildings are St. Peter's Church, which was partly designed by Gandon, and the Courthouse by Richard Morrison. In the 19th century, Portlaoise became home to one of the most modern jails and railway stations of the 19th Century. The rapidly expanding town is situated on the main Dublin / Cork Road, in the heart of the midlands.

## ROCK OF DUNAMAISE

Crowned by ruined walls, this dramatic 150ft outcrop soars above the low lying Laois countryside is easily spotted from the

*Continues on Page 11*

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**FROM PAGE 10**

nain road and extremely accessible from the N80. Before the arrival of St. Patrick in 432 AD, the rock and surrounding land were the property of the O'More clan and the Chieftain Laois Deann Mor gave his name to the area. One of the most ancient sites in Ireland, it was included by Greek geographer Ptolemy in his map of 140 AD. Recently excavated, it is beginning to slowly resemble its former brilliance.

**STRADBALLY**

A picturesque village in the heart of Laois, overflowing with history and culture. Stradbally Manor, the Georgian seat of the Cosby family, is without a doubt in exquisite sight to behold. An ancient 'mass rock' which served as a church during penal times, still stand erect amid a flourishing and timeless forest. Stradbally village is a hive of activity during the summer months hosting the annual Flower Festival and Steam Rally. However, those who should miss these events can view the steam museum which is open all year long.

**VICARSTOWN**

Vicarstown is an attractive harbour on the Grand Canal offering activities such as walking,

cycling, boating and fishing. Buildings of interest include the 1860's Grattan School and Grattan Lodge built in 1882 by Henry Grattan's granddaughter Lady Pauline Grattan Bellow. The 9th century Viking Ship fortress 'Dunrally' is located on the banks of the river Barrow adjacent to Vicarstown. Historians believe it was the base for savage Viking raids plundering the wealthy churches and monasteries which lined the river. An unmissable sight is the Grattan Aqueduct, built in 1790.

**BALLYBRITTAS**

Ballybrittas dates back to the 18th century. It developed as a village along the then new Dublin / Limerick road. As with many Irish villages, the only remains of a once great estate is the ivy clad ruin of the former estate house and a village church, the Rathdaire Church of Ireland, commissioned by Corniela Adair after her husband's death. When designing the church, architect James Fuller made full use of the Hiberno-Romanesque style. Another site of interest is Rath House, Regency building commissioned by the Deases featuring a most delicate Conservatory.

**THE HEATH**

The great Heath of Maryborough is one of the most well known archeological sites in the country. It features iron age ring barrows, bronze age cultivated ridges, Rath Shane and an ancient assembly called "aenoch" where annual meetings were held. The site also contains a stone called Leac Keta, which is where the seven cantes of Leix met. The 19th Century saw horse racing and manoeuvres by the Queen's county militia.

**COOLBANAGHER**

The late 19th century church of St. John the Evangelist on Coolbanagher was designed by the famous architect Gandon. The church contains a Dawson mausoleum designed by Gandon. The church also houses the original church plans. It features a ancient carved font as well as urns designed by Gandon which have only recently been moulded and installed. Skirting the grounds of Shaen Castle are the ruins of the old Coolbanagher Church and the Hartpole Tower House.

**EMO COURT AND GARDENS**

A charming rural village located just five minutes drive from the

main Dublin/Cork road. Emo is well known for its famous demesne comprising a magnificent house designed by James Gandon and 75 acres of gardens and parkland which are open to the public. The mile long avenue leading to Emo Court (1795) is dotted with giant Californian Redwoods planted in 1863. Pleasant grass paths wind back and forth and reveal a beautiful lake and small gardens hidden in the midst of woodland. This idyllic view is not to be missed.

**PORTARLINGTON**

On the border of counties Laois and Offaly lies the lively town of Portarlinton. Its history dates to the latter half of the 17th Century when it became home to a thriving colony of French-Huguenots. Their influence is still evident in the numerous instances of French architecture. One of the best examples is the Protestant St. Paul's church, often referred to as "the French church" which illustrates the ties that still exist between Portarlinton and France. A French Festival takes place each year. Two miles outside Portarlinton the ruins of Lea Castle can be visited, once a prosperous stronghold of the Fitzgerald family.

**Gash Gardens**

**Gash, Castletown, Co Laois. 0502 32247** Situated on the banks of the River Nore is a beautiful, beautiful pocket of serenity to lure both the keen plants-person and the garden novice. Gash Gardens are the splendid and innovative creation of the Keenan family who have been in the horticulture business now for decades. The four acre garden provides a decorative home for many interesting and unusual plants incorporating a large rock garden with rare alpines; a heath garden, rose beds, splendidly colourful herbaceous borders, rhododendrons and a choice collection of trees and shrubs. Visit the 'Moonhouse' and waterfalls, view the gushing water features and meandering streams; travel along the secret passage to enjoy a riverside walk.

**LOCATION:** 1km off the

**Gardens in Laois**

main Dublin/Limerick road at Castletown, 16km from Portlaoise and 16km from Roscrea.

Open from the 1st May to the 30th September 10am - 5pm. Other times by arrangement ADM. IRE£2.50 Per Person (No children allowed) Group rate by arrangement.

**Heywood Gardens**

**Heywood, Co Laois (0502) 33563 (1-1.30pm)** The property consists of formal gardens, woodland, lakes and architectural features. The formal gardens, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and probably landscaped by Gertrude Jekyll were completed in 1912. Heywood lies 7km south-east of Abbeyleix, Co Laois off R432 to Ballinakill.

**OPENING TIMES:** Daylight hours. Tours can be arranged by prior booking. **No admission charge**  
**FACILITIES:** Car/coach park

**ABBEY SENSE GARDENS: The Sensory Garden Main Street, Abbeyleix, Co Laois (0502) 31325**  
**I See advt. page 25**

**JOE'S GARDEN AND PET CORNER**  
**Emo, Portlaoise, Co Laois (0502) 46586** This new and unique garden can be found in the picturesque village of Emo, Co Laois, adjacent to the magnificent Emo Court demesne. Joe's garden had been most thoughtfully designed to enable both disabled and able-bodied people to enjoy gar-

dening. It contains a series of gardens; herb, vegetable, herbaceous and a most unusual Chinese garden. For young people, Percy the pot-bellied pig and his different friends are sure to delight.

**LOCATION:** Emo Village, Adjacent Emo Court Demesne, Portlaoise, Co Laois. **OPENING TIMES:** Open every Sunday and Bank holiday until dusk. Other times by appointment.

**EMO COURT GARDENS**

**Emo, Portlaoise, Co Laois 0502 26573** A magnificent neo-classical house designed by James Gandon in 1790. It is surrounded by extensive parklands with formal lawns, a lake and woodland walks.

**LOCATION:** Emo Village, Portlaoise, Co Laois **OPENING TIMES:** All year round ADM. No admission to the gardens.

*Joe's Garden*  
**as seen on 'Our House'**



This new and unique garden can be found in the picturesque village of Emo, Co. Laois, adjacent to the magnificent Emo Court Demesne. Joe's garden has been most thoughtfully designed to enable both disabled and able-bodied people to enjoy gardening. It contains a series of gardens; herb, vegetable, herbaceous and a most unusual Chinese garden. For younger people, Percy the pot-bellied pig and his different friends are sure to delight.

**OPEN EVERY SUNDAY AND BANK HOLIDAY UNTIL DUSK**  
(other times by appointment)  
Tea/Coffee & Admission £2.50 - Children Free. Tours Welcome  
Phone (0502)46586



● Heywood Gardens, Ballinakill

# A Historic Ramble Through Portlaoise – Our County Capital

LAOIS was constituted as Queen's County by act of parliament in 1556 during the reign of Queen Mary. It was pieced together out of various unrelated Gaelic territories and earlier chiefdoms. After independence in 1922 the county was renamed Laois, or Laoighis in memory of the Loigis or Loigsi - late Iron Age Pict mercenaries who helped Welsh invaders conquer Leinster. Leix refers to a territory of that name which pre-dated the creation of the Queen's shales and sandstones with some coal seams.

**MARYBOROUGH FORT** – Established in 1548 as a fort (fort protector) for defence reasons. Emphasis must be on this old Fort as a monument of national importance. The main physical issues of it are: The Walls, The Rampant Tower, an archaeological investigation and the remains of the South Tower recently discovered.

**RIDGE OF MARYBOROUGH (Burial Ground)** – Circa 1700 this cemetery is situated on a narrow steep hill, the earliest burial ground is that of Rev. Fr. Darby Malone P.P who died in 1773. It is also the last remaining section of an Ice Age Esker.

**OLD MARYBOROUGH GAOL** – Was situated in Church St. where the old library was. This was replaced by the new County library in Lyster square. The old library was built in 1782 and is now part of the new Arts Centre Complex which is being built.

**COURTHOUSE** – Built in 1782 was designed by the architect Morrison and is currently being restored.

**OLD ST. PETERS TOWER** – The remains of this old church tower is opposite the vocational school and adjoining the old gaol. It was built in the 16th century. Rev. Thomas Mosse was Vicar there and Owen O'Neill served mass there.

**METHODIST CHURCH** – The foundation stone for this beautiful little church was laid on Wednesday, May 9th 1883. Completed within seven months it was blessed and opened by Rev. Win. G. Price in December 1883. It is built in early Gothic style, the architect was Mr Morley.

**WAR MEMORIAL** – Built in 1918 it is situated in Bank Place. It is to the memory of 177 officers and men of the 4th Battalion (Leinster) Queens' County Regiment who died in the first World War.

**RAILWAY STATION** – Designed by Sancton Wood it is Gothic style and of local limestone. It was built in 1844 - 1846. It is extremely well kept and a credit to the station staff.

**ST. PETER'S CHURCH** – Built on the green of Maryborough in 1803 its obelisk spire is thought to have been designed by James Gandon.

**INFANTRY BARRACKS (now Garda station)** – Built in 1808 it was known as Maryborough military barracks.

**CONVENT TOWER** – This is on the east wall of the old Fort. It was connected by underground passages to the Fort.

**ST. FINTAN'S HOSPITAL** – This fine building was erected in 1832 and served Laois/Offaly, Longford/Westmeath.

**COUNTY INFIRMARY (Dublin Road)** – Founded by Dr Jacob it was built in 1808.

**PORTLAOSIE PRISON** – Built in 1830 at a cost of £18,500. The new wing was added in 1911.

**ST. PETER'S GRAVEYARD** – This joins the old St Peters church tower and is to the rear of the old gaol. It dates from 1730 approximately. It contains the burial plot of the Jacob family. Dr John Jacob founded the county Infirmary. Also buried there is Highwayman Grant, the last person to be publicly hanged in the town of Maryborough in 1816.


**ST. MARYS CBS** – Town Hall was erected in 1847.

**PRESENTATION CONVENT** – This convent was founded in 1824.

**EMO COURT** - At one time it was one of the really big estates in Laois. Owned by the Dawson Family, John Dawson became the first Earl of Portarlington. This famous domed building was designed by James Gandon. It was later purchased by the Jesuits and then by Mr Chumley Harrison



● The War Memorial, Bank Place, Portlaoise.

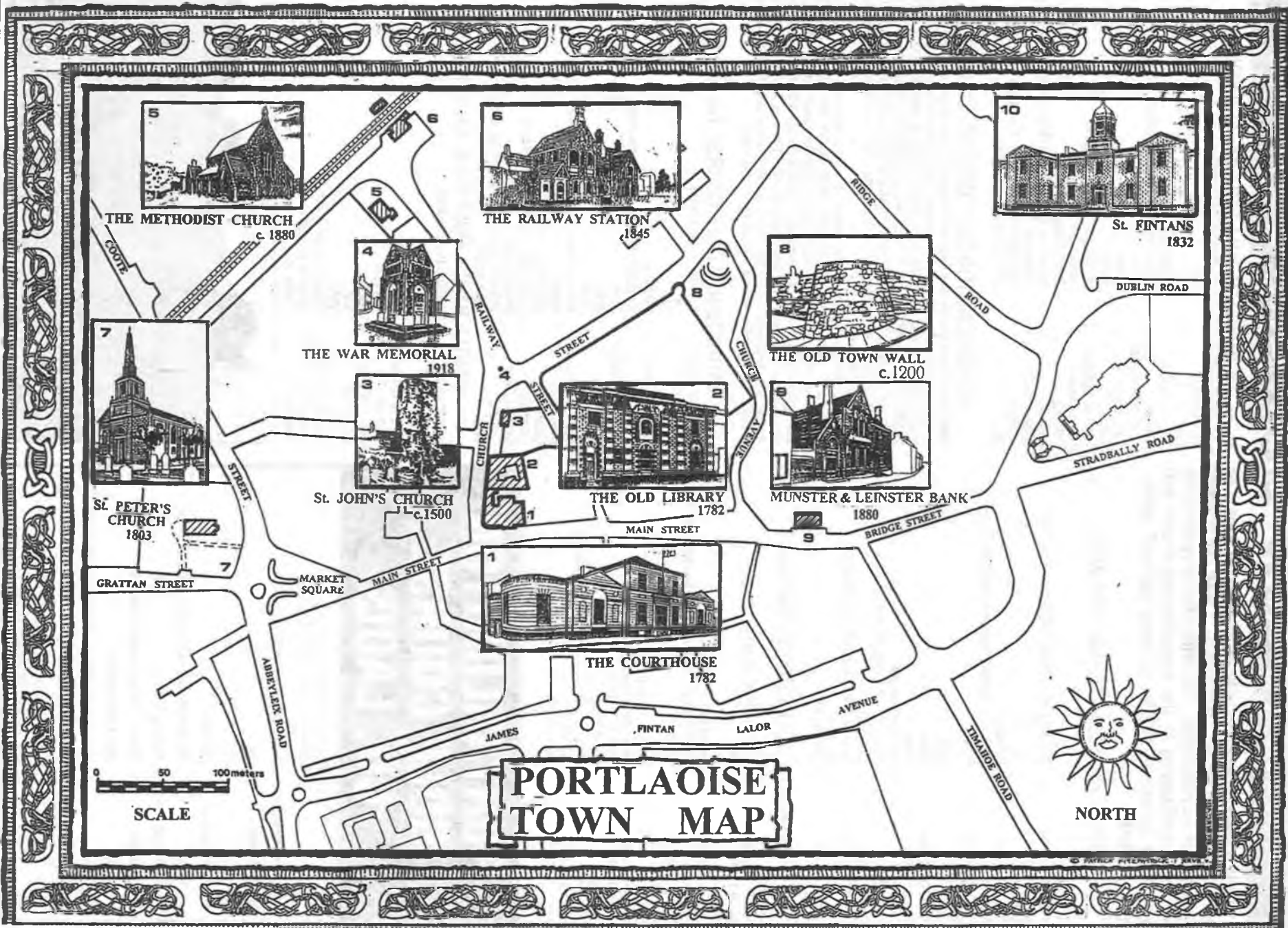
 

**Teagasc Supports Rural Training Programmes**

Teagasc Portlaoise – 0502-21326  
Teagasc Rathdowney – 0505-46451

CAO Michael O'Connor





# PORTLAOISE TOWN MAP

# Golf Courses

**Laos is a golfers paradise with an impressive variety of golfing facilities for all enthusiasts. There are courses here to suit all handicaps. The wide choice varies from the most challenging to the magnificently scenic and each with its own particular features that will exhilarate the visitor.**

## ABBEYLEIX GOLF COURSE, CO LAOIS

Club facts:	
Length of course:	2,813m (3,074 yards) 5,626m. (6,149 yards)
No. of Holes:	9 18
PAR:	35 70
Type of course:	Parkland
Visitors:	Weekdays anytime; weekends by appointment
Club professional:	None
Club shop:	None
Tuition:	None
Practice facilities:	None
Hire services:	None
Catering:	Bar & Restaurant
Location:	1km north of Abbeyleix (R430)
Nearest Town:	Abbeyleix
Contact:	John Downey, Ballyroan Rd., Abbeyleix, Co Laois
Tel:	0502 31303

## THE HEATH GOLF COURSE, CO LAOIS

Club facts:	
Length of course:	6,120m. (6689 yards)
No. of Holes:	18
PAR:	71
Type of course:	Inland championship
Visitors:	Weekdays anytime; weekends by appointment
Club professional:	Eddie Doyle
Club shop:	yes
Tuition:	yes by arrangement
Practice facilities:	Fully illuminated driving range
Hire services:	Club & Trolley hire
Catering:	Bar & Restaurant
Location:	Main N7, Dublin-Cork-Limerick Road (N7)
Nearest Town:	Portlaoise
Tel:	0502 46533

## PORTARLINGTON GOLF COURSE CO. LAOIS

### CLUB FACTS

Length of Course:	6,100m (6,667 yards)
No. of Holes:	18
Par:	72
Type of Course:	Parkland
Visitors:	Weekdays and weekends – please book
Practice Facilities:	Putting Green
Hire Service:	Clubs, Caddy Car and Buggies
Catering:	Bar & Restaurant
Location:	Garryhinch 4km from Portarlington (R423)
Nearest Town:	Portarlington
Contact:	Pauric O'Dea, Garryhinch, Portarlington, Co. Laois. Tel. +353 (0)502 23115

## MOUNTRATH GOLF COURSE, CO LAOIS

Length of Course:	5,493m. (6,003 yards)
No. of Holes:	18
PAR:	71
Type of course:	parkland
Visitors:	Weekdays anytime-Weekends by arrangement
Club Professional:	None
Club Shop:	None
Tuition:	None
Practice facilities:	driving net and putting green
Hire services:	Caddy cars
Catering:	Bar & Restaurant
Location:	2km from Mountrath off Dublin/Limerick road (N7)
Nearest town:	Mountrath
Contact:	John Mulhare, Knocking, Mountrath, Co Laois
Tel:	353 (0) 502 32421/32558

## PORTARLINGTON GOLF COURSE, CO LAOIS

Portarlington Golf Course was designed by golf course designer Eddie Hackett. It was once part of the Warburton Demesne. The original 9 hole course, recognised country-wide as one of the most sylvan in Ireland, was founded in 1909. In 1987, the club embarked on an ambitious programme to extend its course to 18 holes. The new development converted an already beautiful 9 hole course into a magnificent 18 hole course which compares very favourably with the best courses in the country. Opened in June 1992, it offers the golfer a beautifully designed clubhouse with the old gate lodge, circa 1660, brilliantly blending with the new building. The environment hasn't been disturbed. Here we have deer wandering calmly in the woods close by. A sanctuary for pheasant, mallard duck and other wildlife, in the centre of the course provides a breathtaking view. The river Barrow borders the course, and the nearby woods add to the beauty of the setting. For golfers keen to tackle a tough inland course, Portarlington is a must.

## RATHDOWNEY GOLF COURSE, CO LAOIS

Length of Course:	5,795m.(6,338 yards)
No. of Holes:	18
PAR:	71
Type of Course:	Parkland
Visitors:	Weekdays;Weekends by Appointment
Club Professional:	None
Club shop:	None
Tuition:	None
Practice Facilities:	Putting Green
Hire services:	None
Catering:	Bar & Restaurant
Location:	2.5km east of Rathdowney(R433)
Nearest Town:	Rathdowney
Contact:	Richard Cahill, Rathdowney, Co Laois
Tel:	0505 46205

## CASTLE BARNA GOLF CLUB, CO OFFALY

Length of Course:	5,600m.(6,200 yards)
No. of Holes:	18
PAR:	72
Type of Course:	Parkland
Visitors:	Anytime
Club Professional:	None
Club shop:	Yes
Tuition:	None
Practice Facilities:	Practice range & net
Hire services:	Clubs & Trolleys
Catering:	Coffee shop





## The Thatched Village Inn

Coolrain, Co. Laois

Tel. (0502) 35126/35277 • Fax (0502) 35021

e-mail: sheeran@iol.ie

Proprietor: Mrs. Maura Sheeran

Nestling on the foot of the Slieve Bloom Mountains, this family run old world thatched pub is situated in the award winning picturesque village of Coolrain (half-way Dublin-Limerick). This charming pub has much to offer to one and all. Traditional music and set dancing is enjoyed throughout the year. Quality home-made fare is available to the hungry traveller. 3 star I.T.B. approved accommodation in a tastefully restored thatched cottage adjacent to the pub. Coach tours are catered for upon request.

The pub is magnificently complemented by the Slieve Bloom Mountains. One can walk, cycle (bike hire is available) or drive the beautiful Slieve Bloom Way. The Thatched Village Inn owned by the Sheeran family, is a must for those who wish to experience real Irish culture and history, rest and relaxation and of course, a friendly family atmosphere.

Maura, Marguerite and Mark Sheeran hope to meet you soon. Discover the Hidden Ireland in the Slieve Blooms! Coach tours catered for. Music, food and accommodation.



Birr Road, Mountmellick, Co. Laois  
Tel. (0502) 24641

Newly built luxurious ensuite accommodation situated on edge of Slieve Bloom Mountains. Central location for touring any part of Ireland. Guaranteed personal attention, guest sitting room, TV, hairdryers, tea/coffee making facilities, spacious car parking, breakfast menu, excellent home baking. 1 km from town centre. Visa/Access accepted.

# Guide to Laois County

## The Foxrock Inn – Mary's Bar

Tel/Fax: 00353 502 38637

E-mail: foxrockinn@tinnet.ie

**Offering a warm welcome**

Accommodation ensuite (Bord Fáilte approved)  
Fully Licensed Pub, Traditional Music  
Fishing, Golf, Hill Walking, Aghaboe Abbey

## Ballygogue Country House



Ballygogue, Ballacolla, Co. Laois. Tel: (0502) 34025

Georgian Country House in picturesque countryside

**Bed & Breakfast**

Prop. Olive Bailey



## Norefield House

Country Guest House



I.T.B. Approved. Rooms Ensuite. Quiet Peaceful Location

1.5km from heritage town of Abbeyfeix.

15 mins Scenic Walk to Town Centre.

Prop. Terence Lambie

## The Heart of the Midlands

## Rose Cottage Self Catering

In a quite, rural village, close to all amenities



Clough, Ballacolla Co. Laois.

Proprietress: Margaret Bergin

Tel. (0502) 38511 Also (0502) 38615

Very Attractive pebble dash single storey cottage situated on a working farm in the peaceful rural village of Clough. Bedroom en-suite, kitchen,

living room including washing

machine, fridge all self

contained. Walking distance

from pub & two miles

from Grants town Lake

HOW TO FIND US



## Chez Nous

I.T.B. approved



B&B, Kilminchy, Portlaoise, Co. Laois • (0502) 21251

Your hosts: Audrey and Tony Canavan

Pamper yourself in one of the listed "100 best" tastefully decorated in interior design and antiquity. Featured in *Select*, a magazine on interiors of Ireland. Excellent cuisine. Recommended by Frommer, Eilish Dillard and

TRADITIONAL  
FARM Hostel

## Farren House

BALLACOLLA, PORTLAOISE, CO. LAOIS

Tel. (0502) 34032 • Fax (0502) 34008

**A converted Grain Loft and Stables, the building is tastefully converted to comfortable living accommodation to Bord Fáilte standards.**

10 bedrooms ensuite • centrally heated • wheelchair access • cooking facilities in modern kitchen • barbecue area • large dining room with traditional open fire • washing and drying facilities • bicycle hire • centrally located • golfing and fishing nearby • working farm • family run and managed by owners • suitable for conferences up to 40 people for overnight stay and meetings.

## HEYWOOD GARDENS

Ballinakill, Co. Laois

OPEN EVERY DAY

Guided tour every Sunday in  
July and August at 3 pm

## Portarlinton Swimming Pool

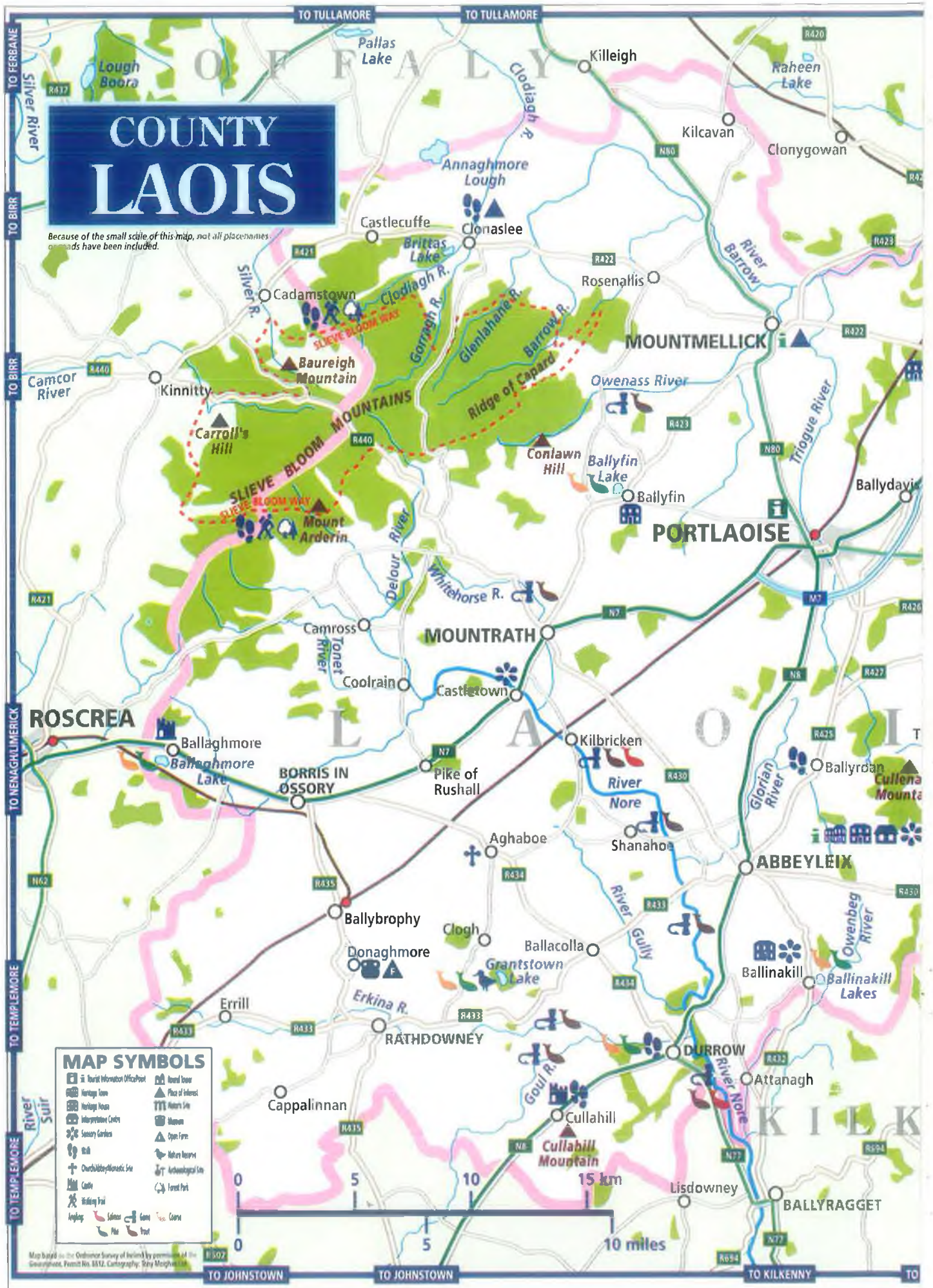
**Swimming for all  
Lessons for adults and children**

• swim caps • aqua aerobics  
Available for bookings for schools and groups

Tel. (0502) 23149

# COUNTY LAOIS

Because of the small scale of this map, not all place names or roads have been included.



## MAP SYMBOLS

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Map based on the Ordnance Survey of Ireland by permission of the Geographical, Permit No. 5512. Cartography: Ray Hughes Ltd.

## OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Abbey Sense Gardens,  
Abbeyleix, Co. Laois,  
**0502 31325**

Ballaghmore Castle,  
Borris-in-Ossory, Co. Laois,  
**0505 21453**

Donaghmore Workhouse  
Museum, Donaghmore,  
Co. Laois,  
**0505 46212**

Donaghmore Open Farm  
Castletown House,  
Donaghmore, Co. Laois  
**0505 46415**

Emo Court & Gardens,  
Emo, Portlaoise,  
Co. Laois,  
**0502 26573**

Gash Gardens,  
Castletown, Co. Laois,  
**0502 32247**

Heywood Gardens,  
Ballinakill, Co. Laois,  
**0502 33563**

Heritage House,  
Abbeyleix, Co. Laois,  
**0502 31653**

Joe's Garden, Emo,  
Portlaoise, Co. Laois,  
**0502 46586**

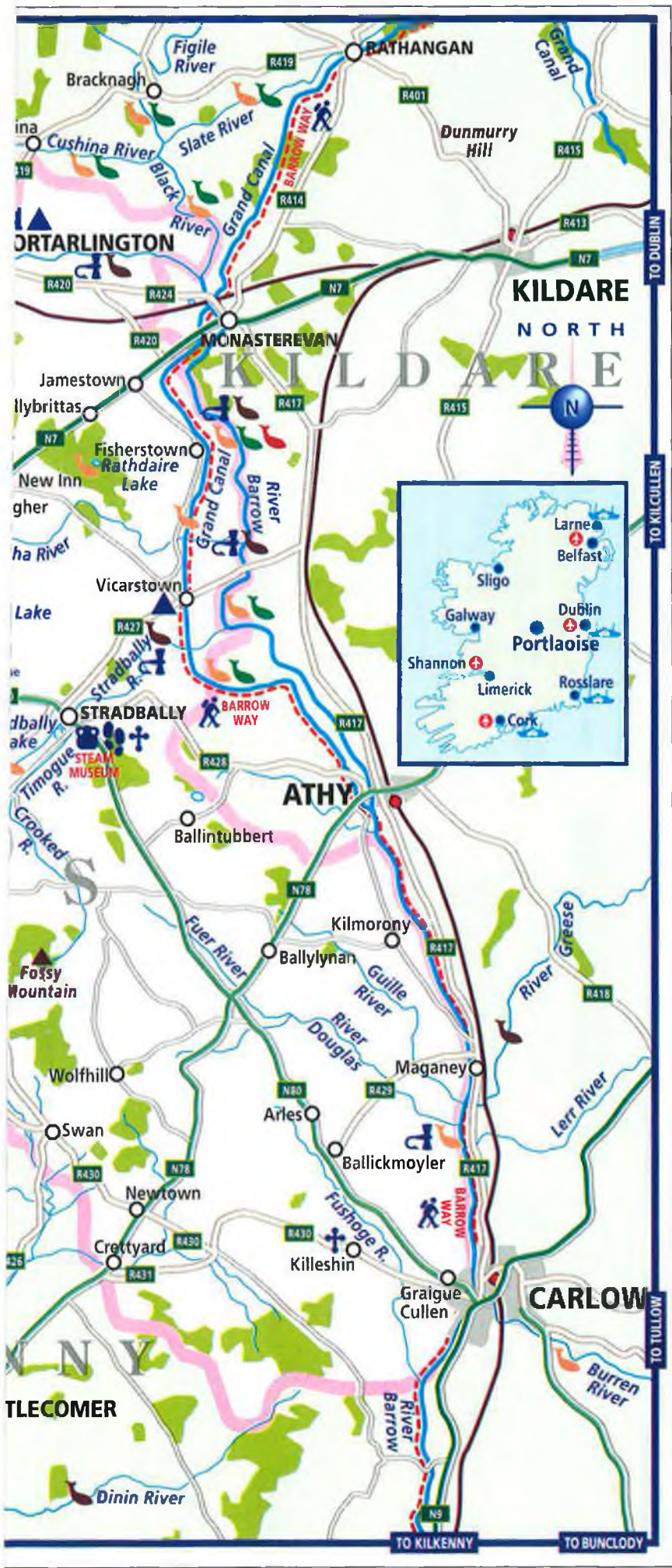
Sexton's House,  
Abbeyleix, Co. Laois,  
**0502 31653**


Stradbally Steam Museum,  
Co. Laois.

## HERITAGE SITES

Aghaboe Abbey, Ballyfin House,  
Coolbanagher Church, Killeshin  
Romanesque Doorway, Rock of  
Dunamase & The Round Tower of  
Timahoe.

FOR ALL FURTHER INFORMATION  
PLEASE CONTACT **ORLAGH BRADY**  
AT HERITAGE HOUSE, ABBEYLEIX,  
CO. LAOISE, IRELAND  
AT 00 353 (0)502 30143.



 **ABBEYLEIX CO. LAOIS**  
Tel: 0502 - 39625 Fax: 0502 - 39638

**Threeave Lodge I.T.B. approved 4 star  
all fax. Self catering accommodation**

3 miles from the Heritage town of Abbeyleix. This modernised  
gate lodge, accommodates 5 bedrooms, 3 en-suite  
(1 Wheelchair Friendly). Sleeps 8-10 people All mod. cons.  
Pay phone, Sky TV & Video



Abbeyleix,  
Co. Laois.  
Prop.: Allison Dowling  
Tel: (0502) 31432/31662

Old Georgian Schoolhouse offering accommodation  
& meals, recommended by leading guides

- (1) John & Sally McKenna's Bridgestone Guide
  - (2) Karen Brown's Ireland, Charming Inns and itineraries
  - (3) Alastair Sawday's Special Places to Stay in Ireland
- Tel/Fax: (0502) 31432**



## Rosedene

Limerick Road, Portlaoise (N7) R445  
Phone/Fax: 0502 - 22346

Charming bungalow just off motor-way quiet  
location, Central location for touring  
the midlands.

Tea/coffee facilities. Breakfast menu. En-suite rooms,  
walking distance pubs, restaurants.  
PRIORIETER LILY SAUNDERS



## Sally Gardens

Old Style  
Traditional Pub  
Bars Snacks Daily  
Ph: (0502) 21658

## Coolanowle House

BALICKMOYLER VIA CARLOW, CO. LAOIS



  
**(0507) 25176**  
MOBILE PHONE:  
**(087) 2738061**

 **I.T.B. Approved Bed & Breakfast**  
Proprietors James & Bernadine Mulball

## Emo, Co. Laois

House open every day until mid-  
September, 10.00-13.00.

Guided tour of the grounds every  
Sunday in July and August at 3.00 pm

*Duchas - the Heritage Service*

## Bed & Breakfast

Maurice & Mary Murphy  
MOUNTRATH ROAD, PORTLAOISE TEL: (0502) 61970

En-suite Rooms & TV  
*Friendly Welcome*

## Conlan House

- Bord Fáilte Approved
  - All Rooms en-suite
  - In the Slieve Bloom Mountains, on the  
Mountrath - Kinnitty Road (R440)
- Special Packages for groups, weekends,  
hill-walking etc.**

KILLANURE, MOUNTRATH, CO. LAOIS.  
Tel & Fax: (0502) 32727



## Portlaoise (Ballybrittas) June Davis Mount John

BALLYBRITTS, PORTLAOISE, CO. LAOIS.

Detached "Old World" house, adjacent to owner's  
residence. Central for touring, N7 1.6km, Gandons Emo  
Court/Gardens 4km, Hinguinol Portarlinton 5.5km, Dublin  
65km. Solid fuel/electric cookers. Kitchen, Lounge,  
Living/diningroom, Bathroom with shower, sleeps 6. French,  
German and Spanish spoken. Damage deposit 1R€50.

**Tel: (0502) 26133 (044) 48761**  
Fax: (044) 40413

## Lodge



Emo, Portlaoise, Co. Laois  
Tel. (0502) 46789/46592 • Fax (0502) 46592

Morette Lodge is a spacious, modern family home in peaceful  
surroundings 200m off the main Dublin/Cork/Limerick  
Road (N7), 5 miles on the Dublin side of Portlaoise, ideal for  
touring the Midlands and the Slieve Bloom Mountains.

Proprietor Kathleen Moore is on hand at all times to cater  
for the needs of her guests.

Enjoy an open turf fire in the T.V. Lounge, central heating,  
home baking and tea/coffee on arrival. Cot and babysitting  
service available on request.



# Heritage House

ABBEYLEIX

*A Heritage Town of Ireland*

Visit the award winning exhibition that  
weaves together the rich fabric of local and  
county history from prehistory to the  
planned de Vesci estate town.

Witness the recreation of the interior of  
the award winning Abbeyleix "Titanic"  
carpet factory.

OTHER FACILITIES INCLUDE:

Coffee Parlour, Craft Shop, Tourist Information  
Car & Coach Parking

.....  
OPENING TIMES:

Weekdays (Mar. - Oct.) 9am - 5pm

Weekends (Mar. Oct.) 1pm - 5pm

**Coffee Parlour opened all year**

£2 admission, concessions plus group rates

Tel: (0502) 31653 Fax: (0502) 30059

Grantstown Lake is a prime coarse fishing  
water at Ballacolla in South Laois, containing  
specimen Pike, Tench, Perch, Rudd and Eel.  
10 double stands are provided for to fish  
from. Access for disabled anglers. Permits £5  
per day.

**Contact: Matt Doyle, tel (0502) 34125**



MOUNTRATH, CO. LAOIS. Tel: (0502) 32756

**Guest Accommodation**

PRIVATE CAR PARK  
Proprietor: F. Wallis

## The Kitchen PORTLAOISE The Foodhall

Tel: (0502) 62061


The Foodhall, home of Irish  
Quality products: Real Olive Co.,  
Hederman Smoked Products, James  
Country Fryre, Helena Chocolates,  
West Cork Herb Farm Co.,  
Irish Farmhouse Cheeses

## Donaghmore Workhouse Museum



DONAGHMORE,  
CO. LAOIS.

Phone: 0505 - 46212  
Fax: 0505-46158

  
The museum (Workhouse) is a unique attraction in Ireland and  
aims to tell the story of the families who lived and died within the  
workhouse walls before during and after the great famine.  
The museum uses guided tours and self guided tours combined with  
various exhibits to explain the socio-economic conditions which led to  
the establishment of this odious poor relief system.

**OPEN 7 DAYS**

**Laois County Tourism Co. Ltd. may be contacted at Heritage House, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois**  
Phone: (0502) 30143 Fax: (0502) 30077 Email - laoistourism@tinet.ie Internet - <http://www.laois.ie>

# Golf Courses



## ● Portarlington

Location: 32km from Portlaoise, 14km east of Tullamore (R402)  
 Nearest Town: Tullamore  
 Contact: Kieran Mangon, Daingean, Tullamore, Co Offaly  
 Tel 0506 53384

### ESKER HILLS GOLF & COUNTY CLUB, CO OFFALY

Length of Course: 6,046m. (6,612 yards)  
 No. of Holes: 18  
 PAR: 71  
 Type of Course: Parkland  
 Visitors: Welcome 7 days a Week  
 Club Professional: None  
 Club shop: yes  
 Tuition: None  
 Practice Facilities: Yes  
 Hire service: Club hire, Buggies & Caddie service  
 Catering: Coffee shop  
 Location: 4km west of Tullamore (N80)  
 Nearest Town: Tullamore  
 Contact: Caroline Guinan, Ballykilmurray, Tullamore, Co Offaly  
 Tel 0506 55999

PORTLAOISE Par 3 is situated at Meelick, Portlaoise. This 50 acre splendid Par 3 18 hole course is set in undulating countryside. The course will take up to two and a half hours to complete. Some of the fairways are over two hundred yards long.

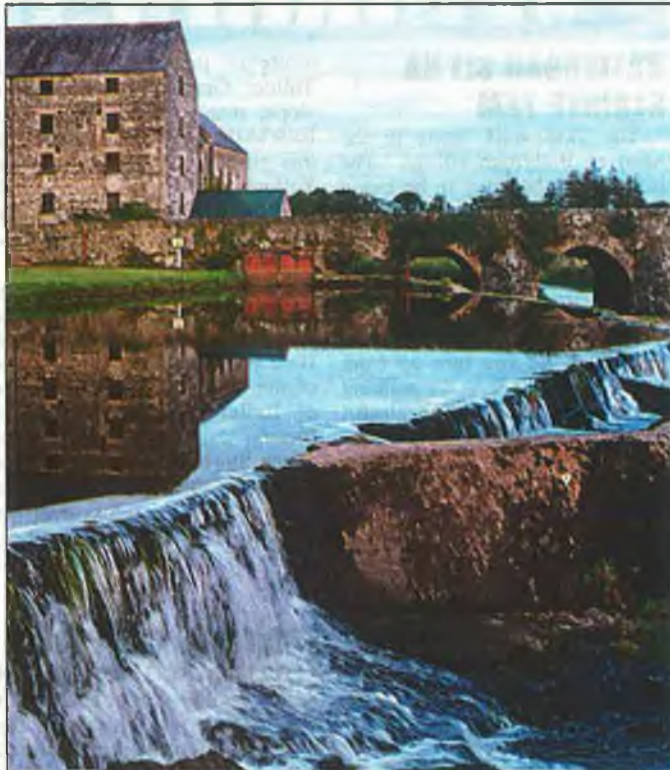
There is a variety of hazards, ranging from mature trees, sand bunkers and undulating bent grass greens to present a challenge to even the low handicap golfer.

Old maps prove that a golf course existed here in the early years of this century. While its history is obscure the golf course is believed to have been the forerunner of the present Heath Golf Club.

## PORTLAOISE PAR 3 CO. LAOIS

### CLUB FACTS

Length of Course: 2,263m. (2,475 yards)  
 No. of Holes: 18  
 Par: 54  
 Type of Course: Parkland  
 Visitors: Anytime  
 Tuition: By Arrangement  
 Practice Facilities: Practice Net  
 Hire Service: Clubs, Bags and trollys  
 Catering: Coffee Shop  
 Location: Cork Road out of Portlaoise (N8)  
 Nearest Town: Portlaoise  
 Contact: Pat McEvoy, Cork Rd, Portlaoise, Co. Laois  
 Co. Laois.  
 Tel. +353 (0)502 61557



## ● Castletown

**The new Terrano.**  
**With 25%**  
**more power,**  
**you'll feel the earth**  
**move.**



AT

**CENTRAL GARAGES LTD.,**

Emmett Street, Mountmellick, Co. Laois. 0502/24105

**YOU  
CAN  
WITH  
NISSAN**

The new Nissan Terrano doesn't just look the part, it plays it. The 2.7TDi engine with turbo intercooler and electronic injection delivers 25% more power and 26% more torque. Take a test drive. Feel the power, experience the glory.

**SUPPORTING LAOIS TOURISM**

# Walking in Co. Laois

## BALLYROAN SLI NA SLAINTE 7KM

The 7km walk starts in the heart of Ballyroan village. The information board is to be found situated on the wall of the old Boys school, which is now known as the Band room. From this vantage point in view is the village, Moate and Bailey, the old water pump and the river Gloreen.

**Stage 1:** As you turn up from the village to follow the walking route you pass the beautiful Roman Catholic Church and situated beside it is the Sue Ryder complex, which is a residents for the elderly.

**Stage 2:** On leaving the village you pass the Girls National school, continuing on this road you pass Bunny's bridge on the left. Following the Dooary road you arrive at the first crossroads. Here we have a resting seat where you can admire the Cullenagh Hills and the flat plane of land in the surrounding countryside.

**Stage 3:** When well rested take the road to the right following the Tullore road where you pass the Dooary Bridge, which flows the Happy River. Walking on this country road you see Blandsfort



● Clonastee Heritage Centre.

estate to the left followed by Tullore Graveyard on a gentle slope, many of the graves date back to the 1800's. Continuing on this peaceful walk you come to Tullore cross where again a resting set is in place. The peace, rest and tranquillity is a sight for a weary mind and body.

**Stage 4:** Taking a right on Ballinlough road you continue your walk on a winding road. Here you have a panoramic view of the beautiful green landscape of Ballyroan. Heading down Preston walk you have the view of the Slieve Blooms, the village and the Cullenagh hills in the background. You cross over the Gloreen and return to the village where you can see the Moate and Bailey.

## DURROW'S LEAFY LOOP

The LEAFY LOOP is a 14 mile, mainly off-road circuit which starts and finishes in the town and offers the perfect mix of tranquil riverside paths, leafy forest tracks, open farmland, numerous historic sites and a rich variety of flora and fauna. Numerous exits can be made from the LOOP to allow the casual walker a variety of shorter loops to suit all fitness levels.

### The Route

The route starts in The Square in Durrow. The route itself follows the course of the River Erkina to where it joins with The River Nore and then follows the Nore as far as the Tally Ho Bridge. Here it turns into Knockatrina Woods, crosses the Durrow- Ballyragget Road(N77) and continues through the Derry Wood to Clonageera. At this point an exit can be made back to Durrow via the Derry Road giving a circuit of approximately 3.5miles\6km (The Blue Loop). Alternatively the walker may continue up The Ballagh to the highest point on the route (170m) affording panoramic views back across Durrow and Co. Laois as far as the Sliabh Blooms. From here the route continues through Capponellan Wood and crosses the main Dublin-Cork Road (N8) into Bishop's Wood where it once again joins the banks of the Erkina and continues to the stone bridge just below Castle Durrow. At this point, a second exit may be made back along the banks of the river and emerging at the old bridge in the town, giving a

longer circuit of approximately 7 miles\12km (The Green Loop). The more serious walker may ignore this exit, turning left through open farmland and into Knockanoran Wood. From here, the route follows Knockanoran Lane to the road (R434) at the Swan Cross, passes the entrance to Moyne Estate, and into Dunmore Wood at Colooney. Here again it joins the banks of the Nore, crosses the main road at the New Bridge, on through the Course Wood to the Old Mill and back along the Mill Road into the town to complete the circuit of approximately 14 miles\23km (The Red Loop).

## SPINK WALK

This five-mile walk (three-hour duration) along an unused county council road, which crosses "Coopers Mountain", is ideal for walking and also pony trekking and cycling. The trail includes three churches, a waterfall, roadside enclosed spring, unspoilt flora and fauna, panoramic view or seven counties. A sight of archeological importance is situated on the trail. The trail will be complimentary to existing facilities in the area and the absence of any vehicular traffic on over three miles of the track renders it unique and makes traditional and organic farming in the immediate vicinity an even more promising venture.

## THE LORD'S WALK - ABBEYLEIX

This refreshing woodland walk is named after the Viscount de Vesce, who was locally referred to as the 'Lord' and used to stroll on this path to Church and the Railway Station. Take time to rest on the seats which have been blended into the bridge sides and

alcoves along the paths. The walk leads past Sexton's House, former home of the sexton to the nearby local Church of Ireland Church and the old world style South School.

## CULLAHILL MOUNTAIN RING WALK

This area is the nucleus from which most of the walks on the mountain stem from. It commences in the village heading eastwards passing the castle church on your right then veering right at the castle on to the Cullahill-Gatabawn road. There is a gradual incline towards Cullahill Mountain passing vibrant hedgerows on either side. Most of Cullahill Mountain itself is covered in Cullahill hazels, which ensures an abundance of wild life and a wide diversity in flora and fauna.

En Route on your right is a spa well known for its curing powers in the past. You then take a sharp left turn and walk towards the top of the mountain (the loop will bring you back towards the new line). Turning left you can start the Healthy Way Walk, however, moving on across the mountain you will see that time has stood still here. The most noticeable thing is the small fields being hemmed in by the stone walls. There are many breath taking views along this way e.g. far away hills, looking down at the lowlands, or a very rugged view of what is known as the Gorse-Neck just before rejoining the Cullahill Gatabawn road. Turning right at this junction we head down hill towards the New-line. About one hundred yards before the new line you can commence another walk known as "O'Sullivan's Path". Reaching the new line you head down hill towards Cullahill.



● The Swallows Quarter Donaghmore



# The Slieve Bloom Way

The trail was set up by the Slieve Bloom Walking Route Committee with the help of the Midlands Regional Development Organisation, the Forest and Wildlife Service, Arderin Mountaineering Club, the Slieve Bloom Association, Laois and Offaly County Councils, the Long Distance Walking Routes Committee of Cospoir and the Midland Regional Tourism Organisation and by courtesy of the landowners involved.

## SLIEVE BLOOM WAY - ROUTE

The Slieve Bloom Way is a circular walking trail of 50km, on forest roads, riverside paths, open mountain and what is traditionally believed to be the old road from Tara to Munster. Two County roads (i.e. Mountrath/Kinnitty road and Mountrath/Clonaslee road) intersect the trail and allow walkers to shorten the route, if desired into two or more circular trips. The recommended starting point is at Glenbarrow car park (N369/081) but there are various car parks such as:

Capard Ridge (N.362/063),  
 Monicknew (N.310/021),  
 Baunreagh (N.295/020)  
 Glendine (S.245/998)  
 Lettercross Roads (N.255/043).

**STAGE 1:** Going clockwise, leave the car park taking the forest road SW through a timber gate with two stone gate piers. Continue along this road through the forest plantation. Where the road ends, continue a short distance through the wood, to the wire fence forest boundary and turn left to climb to the forest road on the Ridge of Capard. On reaching the forest road, turn right and continue until you reach the tarmac road. Now turn left and at the seats and litter bins, turn right. At this point the trail leaves the road and continues for 2km along the ridge in a SW direction, towards the large stone cairn. At the stone cairn, bear left due SE down towards the forest below. At the forest boundary turn right and follow the boundary due SW as far as the ride line. Turn left and descend by the ride line to the forest road below. Here turn right and follow the road for the next 6km to Monicknew car park.

**STAGE 2:** At Monicknew turn right at the tarmac road, over the bridge and continue along the road past the car park. 1km along this road, turn left along a tarred road into a forest plantation. Continue on this road to Baunreagh Picnic Site beside the Delour river. After crossing the bridge, turn left and at the building turn right and keep right to ascend along a forest track through spruce and beech. Now the trail leaves the forest road and ascends through spruce and fir and finally beech wood to meet the tarmac road from Mountrath to Kinnitty. Turn right and follow this road towards Kinnitty for a half km and bear left at the next forest road entrance, which leads into Gorteennameale Valley. Follow the road to within 500m of mature spruce forest. Turn right ascending the bank and leaving the forest road and continue due SW through heather along a ride line through a young plantation. This ride line intersects with another at the corner of a cut away bog and the route continues due SW along the boundary between the forest plantation and cut away bog. A half km of wet trackless moorland must now be crossed before re-entering the forest at a clump of large spruce trees. Turn right and 100m further on take the next forest road to the left and continue to descend to the tarmac road. Turn left and then right, crossing the bridge over the Killeen river. Turn right at the forest road junction beyond the bridge. The forest runs parallel to the Killeen river through to the head of the valley, winding it's way up to the Gap of Glendine. South of the Gap is Arderin (526m) the highest point in the Slieve Blooms. From Arderin three provinces can be seen; Leinster, Munster and Connaught.

**STAGE 3:** At the Gap turn right and climb to the roadway above. Descend by the tarred road through Glendine West. 7km along this road, turn right at a T-junction with another tarred road. 1 km along this road you enter Tulla Gap. At the northern end of Tulla Gap, in a field on your left, beside the river, is "The Fidlers Rock" an ancient standing stone of the late

Neolithic Age. Continue along the road and go right at the next junction, following the tarred road past the holy well on your left and as far as the tumulus in Forelacka. Here the trail leaves the tarred road. Pass through the gates and follow the old path due north on the eastern bank of the stream. After the trail passes by a cattle pen, turn left at the tarred road; cross the bridge and continue to meet the main Kinnitty/Mountrath road. Turn right and continue for 2km. Take the next right junction where the forest road crosses the tarred road. This forest road leads into Glenregan, crosses the tarred road, crosses the Camcor river and continues along the southern side of the valley. The trail eventually leaves Glenregan and rejoins the Kinnitty/Mountrath road at the car park east of Letter Cross Roads. Turn left heading due west down the hill. Bear right at the fork in the road continuing uphill towards Glenletter. Follow this road overlooking Glenletter and Barlahan westwards for 3km. Turn right at the forest gate and descend by forest road and track to cross the silver river at the ford. After the ford continue along the gravel road and after passing the small cottage on the right, turn left up the hill along the forest road. Turn right at the next junction and continue the gradual ascent to the gate and open ground of Spink mountain (484m). From here there is a commanding view of the Bog of Allen to the north. Continue along the road, through the gate into the next plantation and downhill to the next forest road junction. Turn right and at the next crossroads turn right again. Continue for 2km along

this road through spruce forest; then turn left to descend along a narrow lane out of a plantation and onto the tarred road at a small farmhouse. Continue along the tarred road down the valley of Glenskeen. 2km along this road, at the forest entrance, turn right and ascend around the curving bend bearing left at the forest road junction. Turn right at each of the next two junctions to ascend the western flank of Glendineoregan. The road deteriorates to a rough track and eventually turns eastwards and continues to meet the main Clonaslee/Mountrath road at the cut. Turn left at the cut and continue downhill on the tarmac road for 2km. Turn right heading ESE along a gravel path across open ground. Pass through the forest gate and continue northwards keeping to the left at the next junction. Continue for 4.5km along this gravel road overlooking Glenlahan valley on the left. When the two masts on the ridge of Capard due east across Glenbarrow valley are clearly visible, watch for the turn to the left off the forest road. This riverside path continues past the waterfall on to the end of the plantation and ascends to Glenbarrow car park.

## WILDLIFE ON THE WAY

There are interesting plant habits at Glenbarrow and Silver river. Among the flora visible are Orchids, Carline Thistle, Grass of Parnassus, Blue Fleabane and Butterwort. If one travels quietly one may surprise fallow deer, hares, foxes, badgers, red squirrels and pine marten. Most game birds are still plentiful. Hen harriers and ravens can be seen in Glendine valley and crossbill finches in Glendineoregan.

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Cycling offers the perfect opportunity to step out of the hectic bustle of modern life and unwind in the beautiful Irish midlands. The freedom of the countryside is yours at a slow and a relaxing pace. The following are three recommended cycling routes.

Slieve Bloom Bike Hire based in Coolrain, Co Laois is situated at the foot of the beautiful Slieve Bloom Mountains.

Slieve Bloom Bike Hire is a Raleigh Rent A Bike Dealer. It provides a comprehensive range of Raleigh Mountain and touring bikes for rent. Bike Hire includes lock pump repair tool kit, helmet, insurance and a wide range of accessories also for hire.

#### RATES:

Bike/week £30.00  
Bike/Day £7.00

*Bicycle routes and maps available.*

For more information please contact Marguerite Sheeran, Slieve Bloom Bike Hire, The Thatched Village Inn, Coolrain, Co Laois 0502 35277/35126

## SUGGESTED TOURS

### TOUR 1:- DUNAMAISE-CASTLETOWN (ABBEYLEIX)

*Depart Dunamaise-go straight to Stradbally.*

When you arrive in Stradbally continue straight through the town as far as court square where you turn left (opposite Dunnes pub) signposted Timahoe.

Upon reaching Timahoe continue straight through the crossroads and follow the signs (straight through) to the round tower.

Proceed to round tower and old Abbey. After the round tower take the first right.

Ignore the first right turn and continue straight on. There is a fair hill to climb here but afterwards it's downhill all the way!

Note cullentra hill on your right.

Continue straight on at the first crossroads.

At second crossroads turn right

# On Yer Bike

onto the main road.

Continue straight on this road into Abbeyleix

Continue into Abbeyleix (which is a heritage town of Ireland), why not visit Morrisseys while you're there-an old style traditional pub. Turn left at the traffic lights and right at the next junction signposted Rathdowney.

Note National school on your right.

Continue through crossroads.

Go through Ballacolla.

Continue through crossroads note old forge on left.

Ignore left turn at next Y-junction signposted Kilkenny.

At next Y-junction take minor road to the right (old entrance and trees facing you on bad bend).

At next junction right (sharp right) signposted Clough.

At next complex junction turn right and then left signposted Donaghmore.

### TOUR 2:- DONAGHMORE-PORTLAOISE ROUTE

At crossroads turn left signposted Castletown.

Continue straight on ignoring the first turn right to Clough.

Take the next turn right - down hill.

At T-junction turn right and then left.

Turn left at main road - Aghaboe Abbey on your right (well worth a visit!).

Take the first turn off the main road and continue straight on ignoring the road on your left signposted Pike of Rushall and Coolrain.

Continue straight on through crossroads.

Continue on until you reach the main road where you turn right towards Castletown and Mountrath.

Continue straight on this road until you see a signpost to the right for Castletown.

Continue straight on to Mountrath.

Take a right turn out of the town signposted Portlaoise N7.

Keep on this road until you reach the town of Portlaoise.

On entering the town you come to a small roundabout, take the second turn off the roundabout down the main street.

### TOUR 3: PORTLAOISE-VICARSTOWN ROUTE

Take the Dublin road towards Kildare/Monasterevin.

Continue on through Ballydavis.

After you pass through Ballydavis take the first road on your left to Coolbanagher/Emo.

Continue on this road for some time until you see Coolbanagher church on your right hand side.

Continue straight on through

the first crossroads.

When you reach the crossroads take a right through Emo village.

Emo court and Gardens are on your left as you pass through the village. These are well worth a visit.

After visiting Emo court continue on through the village leaving the post office, the church and the "Park Inn" pub on your right.

Continue on this road until you come to the main Dublin road at the "New Inn".

You take the road directly opposite you beside the small shop. This road takes you to Vicarstown and is known as the "Bog road".

As you near Vicarstown note the mill on your right hand side.

Continue straight on through the crossroads.

After a few minutes you will pass Vicarstown church on your left-hand side. Follow the road around to your left, which takes you into the village.

Arrive back at the Vicarstown Inn. Relax and enjoy a well-earned drink.



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# Equestrian activities in County Laois

LAOIS offers a choice of horse riding facilities catering for every rider, whether novice or experienced, regardless of age. Each stable has ponies or horses available for trekking or riding out over farmlands, mountains and forest trails. Each school offers private tuition suited to each individual's needs.



● Out for a hack at Portlaoise Equestrian Centre.

PORTLAOISE Equestrian Centre is a purpose built training, education and competition facility standing on 20 acres, 1 km from Portlaoise town Centre.

Established in 1993, Portlaoise Equestrian Centre is approved by the Association of Irish Riding Establishments and the British Horse Society.

#### Facilities at the centre include:

- Accommodation (self-catering) for 25 people – staff and residential students.
- Stabling for 50 horses.
- Indoor arena – 60m x 25m.
- Cross country course.
- Large coffee dock, heated, overlooking indoor arena.
- Lecture room.
- Shower and changing facilities.
- Large car park.

#### Portlaoise Equestrian Instructors:

**Ronan Sheehan**, Manager. B.H.S.A.I. Former International Young Rider – Showjumping. SJAI Regional Course Builder.

**Anne Marie Dunphy**, Chief Instructor. I.C.E.S. Dressage Rider and Trainer. List 5 Dressage Judge. Medium I.P.S. and A.I.R.C. Instructor and Examiner.

**Gail Doogue**, B.H.S.A.I. Medium I.P.S. and A.I.R.C. Instructor and Examiner. R.D.A. Instructor.

**Faith Ponsoby**, B.H.S.I. (SM), I.D.E.S. M.A. B.H.S. Examiner.

#### Activities at the centre include:

- Qualified instruction at all levels from beginners to advanced, children and adults, group lessons.
- Specialised tuition, competition preparation on a private or semi-private basis by arrangement.

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- Regular competitions including SJAI Points Shows, Training Shows, Dressage, Riding Club, Pony Club, National Inter Schools Championships and Inter Varsity Championships.

- Livery, breaking, competition and sales preparation.

- Polocrosse.

- Portlaoise Equestrian Centre Pony Camp during school holidays.

- Irish Horse Board Stallion Inspections.

- Irish Holstein Fresian Society Shows.

**The following clubs are based at Portlaoise Equestrian Centre:**

- Triogue Branch of the Irish Pony Club.

- Laois Branch of the Riding for the Disabled Association of Ireland.

## KILHAVAN HORSE DRAWN CARAVANS

For further information contact: Kilvahan horse drawn caravan, Kilvahan, Portlaoise. 0502 27048

## PONY TREKKING

Kerr Equestrian activities Cremorgan, Timahoe, Portlaoise. 0502 27162

The Laois Hunt meets throughout the season and welcomes visitors. Contact Mrs. Jane Whelan, 0502 31265.

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SIMI

# Out and About

## Abbeyleix

Now a heritage Town of Ireland.

Abbeyleix is unquestionably one of the finest planned estate towns in the country with spacious tree lined streets, picturesque period houses and heritage trails. Situated in the heart of Ireland near the Nore, a river famous for its fishing it was founded by the deVesci in the mid 18th Century near the 12th Century Cistercian Monastery which gives the town its name. One can relax and stroll on any of the signposted walks in and around the town, taking in the charm of its collection of the 18th and 19th Century buildings. Visit the old Patrician Monastery schoolrooms, now Heritage House, where one can experience over 2000 years of history in this award winning Interpretative Centre.

## Aghaboe

The site of St. Canice's Monastery in the sixth-century. Plundered in 913, rebuilt in 1052, burnt in 1116, rebuilt in 1234, and again burnt in 1346. The nineteenth-century church on site of the Augustinian Priory church retains thirteenth-century pieces and pieces from the nearby fourteenth-century Dominican Abbey.

## Arles

THE head of the Catholic parish of Kilabban, its church is late nineteenth-century with a broach spire by Pugin and Ashlin (1865). Beside the church is the remarkable Grace mausoleum. Behind the chapel is the grave of Patrick Cahill, prominent tenant-leader and first editor of the "Leinster Leader" newspaper.

## Attanagh

Village largely consisting of charming cluster-a First-Fruits style Church of Ireland church, school with porch and coigns and Glebe House. Near Attanagh important horse races were held in the nineteenth-century and early this century heavy first-quality bricks were manufactured.

## Ballacolla

Late 18th century well-kept village which grew on the crossing

which grew on the crossing of two important county roads. It has access to attractive countryside and performs in the annual Tidy Towns Competition.

## Ballaghmore

Ballaghmore castle (1480) the chief seat of the Mac Gillpatricks Lords of Upper Ossory. Strategically placed on the Bealach Mor, the great road to Munster. Partially destroyed by Cromwellians in 1647 it came into the possession of the Cootes who leased it to the Elys. Richard Ely, financed by a hoard of gold found on his land, partially restored it in the 1830s. It was bought by its present owners in 1990 and restored. It had many interesting features including a rare devilish sheila-na-gig on a quoin at the west angle, and outstanding views from the battlements.

## Ballyadams

Townland with the atmospheric Bowen castle, much associated with the notorious Shawn-a-Ficha. The castle was possible medieval in origin: it has many additions including a mid-seventeenth-century three-storey house at the back. Used until the nineteenth-century. West of the castle is a windmill and a good example of a late eighteenth-century T-plan barn church. South of the church in the ruins of a medieval church is a double effigy armorial Bowen tomb, and an effigy of Walter Hartpole (d.1597).

## Ballyfin

Ballyfin is a small rural parish at the foot of the Slieve Bloom Mountains.

The landmark of Ballyfin is Ballyfin House possibly the finest neo-classical houses in the country. Built in 1821 in Slieve Bloom sandstone by Sir Charles Coote to the designs first of Dominic Madden and then Sir Richard Morrison and his son William Vitruvius.

## Borris-In-Ossory

Originally a cluster around the ruined fifteenth-century Fitzpatrick castle, the village grew along the eighteenth-century coach road and depended on the woollen trade.



The 12th Century Lea Castle, Portarlinton, on private land. Permission to visit must be had from the owner who lives nearby.  
Photo: Alf Harvey.

# Out and About

North of the village is Kyle of Cluain Freta Molua, the site of a monastery founded by St. Lugaid or Molua who came from Limerick and died in 609. It was an important centre of learning in the seventh-century and works on biblical commentaries survive in manuscripts all over Europe.

## Camross

Forestry created Camross in the midseventeenth-century and today largely sustains it. It is one of the country's important centres of Gaelic games, celi music and dancing. About 5km north-east is the rath of Monelly.

## Castletown

The Dublin-Limerick road bypasses this small and justly-proud Georgian village built around a triangular fair green. In 1182 Hugh de Lacy built a castle here for Robert de Bigarz, and it became the centre of an important Norman borough. Only fragments of the castle remain. South of the village in Church town are the ruins of a medieval church.

## Clonaslee

A largely nineteenth-century village. The Catholic Church (1813) with its fine iron gates and gate-piers is oddly tucked in behind other buildings. The Church of Ireland church (1814), which dominates the village, has been renovated into a visitor centre. Nearby are the ruins of Brittas House, an 1869 gothic mansion set in the remains of grounds still containing exceptional specimens of trees, shrubs and plants.

## Coolrain

A favourite place for refreshments and traditional music. It grew alongside the sixth-century monastery of Saint Mochowmog founded near the junction of the Nore and Delour. The forests and sawmilling sustain the village.

## Cullahill

The village has an impressive early fifteenth-century tower house, the principal stronghold of MacGillapatricks of Upper Ossory. The 'castle' has an interesting Shiela-na-Gig, and a simple associated medieval church. Nearby are three other houses, Gortnaclea, Kilbreedy and Aghmacart.

## Donaghmore

Originally associated with an early medieval church, and then with an early Norman fornication. It became an extensive industrial complex in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It has attractive buildings and two thriving pubs overlooking a river and old bridge. A short distance northwest is the unique Donaghmore Workhouse Museum, which depicts the story of Ireland's poor in the 1800s.

## Durrow

Originally a Norman borough the seventeenth century Ormonds made it part of Kilkenny. It was returned to the county in 1846 by Act of Parliament. It is a planned estate village, developed under the patronage of the Viscounts Ashbrook. Perhaps its finest feature is the suite of buildings around the Green under the gates a battlemented wall which in turn enclose a tastefully designed modern primary school and the important "castle" (1713-32) one of the last large pre-Palladian houses to be built in Ireland, and which was designed by its owner William Flower.

## Emo

A late eighteenth-century village developed around the gates of Emo Court under the patronage of the Dawsons. The recently renovated Gandon Inn is a late eighteenth-century building designed by Gandon. The Catholic Church is hard gothic, designed by J.S. Butler in 1861. Inside the door is the tomb of Lady Portarlington with a recumbent effigy by Boehm.

## Killeshin

An important medieval monastic centre, its name may derive from Gleann Uissean, the valley in which it was established or from Kill Uisin, the church of Oisín. Sadly its round tower was finally destroyed in the eighteenth-century. Nevertheless the surviving ruins include one of the finest Romanesque doorways in the country.

## Luggacurran

Village on the Slieve Margy hills, famously linked with the Lansdowne estate and the Land War in the 1880's and 90s.

## Mountmellick 'Quaker Town'

The Quakers with their leader William Edmundson settled in the vicinity of Mountmellick in the 1780's. With their arrival the town experienced large-scale industrial manufacturing, the Quakers were the catalyst of these developments. This town was the home of the first sugar beet factory in Ireland. The legacy of the Quakers in Mountmellick is not only an industrial one. There were great humanitarians and their efforts during the Famine are well documented. The Quakers also created Mountmellick Embroidery unique with white stitch on white cotton – the inspiration for the patterns is taken from the flora along the banks of the Owenass river, which circles Mountmellick in horseshoe shape. Its enterprise is still exemplified by the Mountmellick Development Association. A pleasing town with a fine square, architecturally impressive houses, shops and ecclesiastical buildings.

## Mountrath

Mountrath dates from the 17th Century when Sir Charles Coote started to turn his new estate, which was covered in wild woodland, into an important centre for iron, brewing, cotton and farming. In 1641, extensive linen industries and other property were destroyed but Coote's son Charles regained the land and was given the title of Earl of Mountrath. In 1801, Mountrath had two distilleries, two breweries, a cotton spinning factory, an oil mill and an iron works, which emphasises Mountrath's importance in past industry.

## Portarlington

Founded in 1666 in a bend of the Barrow River by Sir Henry Bennett, Lord Arlington. After the Jacobite wars, the lands were given to General Roubigny, Earl of Galway who established a thriving colony of French Huguenots in the town: separate chapels and schools were built for the English and French. Along with education the town became a centre for silversmiths and banking. The town has Gregorian, Huguenot and Victorian architecture of exceptional quality. An annual French festival is held in the town.

## Potlaoise

A prosperous commercial centre and principal town and administ

# Out and About

rative centre of the county, situated at the intersection of a number of national roads, and on the main railway between Dublin, Cork and Limerick. Originally designed as a military outpost for the defence of settlers, it was placed to the southwest of the Triogue River, and is first referred to in the Annals of the Four Masters in 1548 when it was known as the Campa of Leix. The present town was laid out in the eighteenth-century, and the principal buildings date from ten or later. Its many notable buildings include St Peter's Church, the Courthouse and its associated Old Gaol, the late nineteenth-century gothic Methodist Church, the Munster and Leinster Bank and St Fintan's hospital. Notable new buildings include the County Hall Headquarters and Government Headquarters.

## Rathdowney

Takes its name from the rath or ring fort, which until 1840 was at the end of the Town Square near the Church of Ireland church. It was a thirteenth century Norman manor. It developed as a town in the early nineteenth century with brewing as the main industry until 1966 when Perry's Brewery was converted into a successful meat processing plant. Birthplace of Thomas Prior, founder of the R.D.S.

## Rosenallis

The village of Rosenallis is situated on an elevated site at the foot hills of the Slieve Bloom Mountains. Rosenallis grew as a village when like Mountmellick it became a Quaker colony and linen centre. Less than a mile out of the village on the Mountmellick road is a beautiful "Society of Friends Rosenallis burial ground".

## Stradbally

A picturesque village in the heart of Laois, overflowing with history and culture. Stradbally Manor, the Georgian seat of the Cosby family, is without a doubt an exquisite sight to behold. An ancient 'mass rock' which served as a church during penal times, still stand erect amid a flourishing and timeless forest. Stradbally village is a hive of activity during the summer months hosting the annual Flower Festival and Steam Rally. However, those who should miss these events can view the steam museum, which is open all year long.

## Timahoe

The village community of Timahoe is beautifully situated in a board and fertile valley. The houses are built around a large central green commonly called the Goosegreen. A 12th century round tower standing 96ft high is located at the outskirts of the village. The monastic sights include an impressive Romanesque doorway. A monastic community existed in Timahoe until the late 1550's. The land remained with the Church of Fossey, now in ruins, until the suppression of the monasteries. Under the reign of Queen Elizabeth the lands were granted to Francis Cosby, Captain of the Queens Kern and Governor of Maryborough. Another attraction is the Town Castle built by Hugh de Lacy in 1189.

## Wolfhill

A rural area which until the 1920s was an important coal mining area. A walking route has been developed locally.

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## Abbey Sense Gardens

The Sensory Garden, Main Street, Abbeyleix, Co Laois

(0502) 31325



Abbey Sense Garden will appeal to everybody by the stimulation of their senses, vision, smell, touch, taste and sound. The garden is set in the old walled garden of the Brigantine Convent, first commenced in 1842, when two Brigantine Sisters - Mother Bernard Redmond and Mother Claire Honson established a Convent in Abbeyleix. A stone plaque on one of the garden walls along the Lime Tree Walk commemorates the Sisters arrival.

The journey which began in 1842 by the Brigantine Sisters; is now continued by the Sisters of Charity of Jesus & Mary who have established in Abbeyleix a sensory garden which provides a peaceful haven of spiritual and sensory nourishment and contemplation for you the visitor. The Brigantine Sisters let in Abbeyleix a strong sense of history and commitment to the environment, shared by many. Their garden which has been reshaped and developed as a sensory garden provides a wonderful amenity, not only for the people of Abbeyleix, but also for visitors able and disabled.

As you go the garden it becomes a journey of discovery. It appeals to your senses and as you proceed on and turn a corner, you will see colour, form and shape, and hear competing sounds, and as you walk through the garden you will feel; underfoot and as a light breeze blows on your back, smell the different perfumes.

Scent is one of the most evocative of the five senses. It can bring back memories of childhood and special summer days. This garden not only evokes all those scent memories but also those of the person's other intact senses.

The garden is constructed so that it is wheelchair accessible, and of interest to all, but particularly for people who are disabled, for whatever reason.

Abbey Sense Garden is only in its infancy but as it grows and matures it will be a living experience for all.

**LOCATION:** Main street, Abbeyleix, Co Laois  
**OPENING TIMES:**  
**ADMISSION:**

## The Sensory Garden

### Abbey Sense Garden

Dave House, Main Street, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois.  
 Tel: 0502-31636/31325 Fax: 0502-31386

Abbey Sense Garden is well worth a visit as it is a garden where people of all abilities can enjoy nature at its very best.

It is a tribute to peoples' hard work and commitment.

All year round opening to visitors.

Hours: Mon.-Fri. 10am - 4pm

April-Sept: Sat. & Sun. 2pm - 6pm

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# Angling . . . Angling . . . Angling . . .

Welcome to County Laois the cross-roads of Ireland - a gem set in the rural tranquility of the Irish Midlands. This part of Ireland boasts some of the finest angling in the country as well as interesting places to visit. The fishing here, has always been good but remained undiscovered, possibly because of the value put on it by the local angling fraternity.

This situation has now changed and visitors are welcomed and encouraged to spend some time here. In order to provide good quality angling for all, much work is being done to develop both the fisheries themselves and angling facilities within the county. Even so, the river angler can still sometimes fish miles of water in total solitude.

## GAME ANGLING

### THE RIVER BARROW

The River Barrow, one of the three sister rivers, rises in the Slieve Bloom Mountains in north-west County Laois and flows in an easterly and then southerly direction to frame the north and east of the county before continuing on its journey to meet the sea at Hook Head. Its headwaters provide the birthplace and home of the young trout and salmon. It flows on past the quiet townships of Mountmellick and Portarlinton in a series of ripples and pools where the bigger trout take up residence and provide good sport for the angler. Practically all of the trout in this river are native wild fish.

From late spring onward this area becomes the resting place for big salmon on their return from their sojourn to the feeding grounds in the seas around the Faroes and Greenland.

After it has veered south past the town of Monasterevin the river slows down considerably, probably reluctant to leave behind the lush meadows of County Laois. Trout and salmon can be found in some areas along this section also.

### THE RIVER NORE

The Nore, a sister river of the Barrow, also rises in the Slieve Blooms and meanders across County Laois before turning south to join up with the Barrow at their common estuary. With a pool/ripple/glide sequence throughout most of its length it has all the characteristics of a

classic salmon/trout river.

The Nore is a noted dry-fly fishery with good trout, salmon and pike stocks. Around Durrow and further downstream some of the best salmon and trout may be found from early season onwards.

Some of the tributaries of the Barrow and Nore rivers provide very good trout angling, particularly in early season. Among the better ones are the Owenass, Cushina, Slate, and Stradbally Rivers in the Barrow catchment, and the Erkina, Goul, and Whitehorse along the Nore Valley.

The Barrow and Nore between them forge beautiful and historic river valleys and are part of a rich heritage in Ireland's Midlands.

## COARSE ANGLING

The coarse angling enthusiast is well catered for in County Laois with angling available in canal, river, and a number of scenic lakes around the county.

### RIVER BARROW

The River Barrow downstream of Monasterevin holds bream, pike, perch, and hybrids of above average size. There are many spots along the river to choose from, and it's never overcrowded.

### FIGILE RIVER

The Figile river near Portarlinton is a gem of a river for pike anglers holding spec-

men fish of 30lbs and over. Close by are the Cushina, Slate and the Black rivers, which also spoil the angler for choice.

### THE ERKINA

A section of the Erkina near Durrow, known as The Curragh is renowned for its specimen pike weighing up to fifteen lbs and more.

### THE GRAND CANAL

The Barrow branch of the Grand Canal, in east Co Laois, holds good stocks of bream, tench, hybrids, pike and perch. Vicarstown is the recognised coarse angling centre for the area.

### GRANSTOWN LAKE

There is very good quality stillwater fishing at Granstown Lake, Ballacolla. The lake contains large quantities of pike, tench, perch, rudd and eel. The lake situated in a nature reserve is open from April to October. For all further information contact Matt Doyle 0502 34125

### BALLYFIN LAKE

Ballyfin Lake near Mountrath contains pike, tench and rudd. A beautiful lake set in the grounds of the Patrician Brothers. It is a popular angling spot for locals and tourists alike.

### BALLINAKILL LAKES

Mass Lough and Gills Pond at Ballinakill are two small lakes

with superb angling in a lovely setting. Here you have pike, rudd and good tench angling.

### TEMPLEMORE LAKE

This lake is situated in the town park and is an extremely popular attraction for anglers as it contains excellent pike, tench and rudd angling.

### LITTLE BOG LAKE

Little Bog Lake at the Heath, Portlaoise contains good stocks of rudd and pike. It is situated in the heart of one of the most historic sites in Ireland.

### BALLAGHMORE LAKE

Ballaghmore Lake near Roscrea contains excellent carp, rudd, perch, pike and eel.

Plans for the development of New Lakes and re-stocking of older lakes at Stradbally, Ballybrittas and Clonaslee are currently under way and should add greatly to the Angling experience in 1998.

## ANGLING

Practically all of the fisheries in County Laois are managed by angling associations, local development groups and others interested in promoting tourism in the county. Angling permits are available locally. A state licence is required for salmon fishing.

## Tanguy de Toulgoët

Moyne Estate,  
West Hall Stable,  
Durrow, Co. Laois.

Phone/Fax: (0502) 36578

- Dry Fly fishing trips
- Tuitions and guiding



Granstown Lake, Ballacolla, Co. Laois.



# Abbeyleix Heritage Town of Ireland

Abbeyleix Heritage Company chose the town trail to illustrate the different influences which together form our heritage.

## Heritage House

Built in 1884, it was initially staffed by lay teachers, but in 1933 the Patrician Brothers took over the running of the school.

In 1993 Abbeyleix Heritage Company Limited acquired the site as Heritage House.

## Abbey Sense Garden

(see Page 25)

## Church of the Most Holy Rosary

In the 1890's the Rev. James Lalor P.P., the parishioners and the then Lord de Vesci undertook the construction of a new church. Mr Haige was the architect. The stained glass windows were of Munich Glass.

## Temperance Street

The Temperance Street dwellings were commissioned in the 19th Century by Viscount de Vesci as part of a 25 house development. They were rented to elderly persons and widows at a peppercorn rent. The renovated building was officially opened by her Excellency, The President, Mary Robinson in 1993.

## Bank of Ireland Building

This neo-classical structure was purpose built for the Hibernian Bank in 1906 by the architect J.P. Wren. A notable feature is the copper dome set on the cube of the tower.

## The Carpet Factory

The carpet factory was situated at the back of the present day Abbeyleix Motor Works. These carpets were supplied to Harrods in London and Marshall Fields in Chicago. The coronation of George V. Carpets for the ill-fated Titanic, were Manufactured here.

## Permbroke Terrace

This terrace of houses known as Pembroke Terrace. So called after Lady Ema, daughter of the 11th Earl of Pembroke who married Thomas, the 3rd Viscount de Vesci. The buildings were constructed in the early 19th century, as part of her dowry.

## Methodist Church/Epworth Hall

The chapel was built in 1826 and provided seats for 130 people. A further building was added in 1914 communicating with the chapel and providing for other church activities. This was called Epworth.

## Preston House

Originally known as the Assembly Rooms where meetings and concerts were held.

In 1895 the Assembly Rooms were leased to the Preston School a secondary school. The school continued in operation until 1966.

## Memorial to 3rd Viscount

A gothic octagonal shrine built after a competition in 1877, to the design of Rawson Carrol.

## Wingfield Memorial

The inscription reads "In Memory of the Honourable and Reverend William Wingfield, Vicar of Abbeyleix 1836 -1880.

## Station House

Built, between 1861 - 1865, to link the Waterford and Kilkenny Railway (WKR) at Kilkenny to the Great Southern and Western Railway (GSR) at Maryborough (Portlaoise).

## South School

The residence in the school which was built in 1843 served as the

original school. The 1893 extension allowed for more roomy classrooms and more spacious residence. This gem of rural Ireland is a must to see.

## Church of Ireland Parish Church

The original Church was built in 1828. The architect was John Semple. In 1865, Lady Ema, wife of Thomas, 3rd Viscount de Vesci, initiated the rebuilding of the nave and added the chancel and aisles. The architect was Sir Thomas Wyatt.

## Sexton's House

The Sexton's House stands near the church so that he would have been close to his place of work. Step back in time to 1810 and view the accommodation and clothes of the time.

## "Jelly's Pit"

This area, a contribution to the community of Abbeyleix from Viscount de Vesci, started its life as a sand pit, hence the depression in the middle of the field. The area is administered by four trustees. Here are located Abbeyleix Tennis Club, St. Lazerians Hurling and Football Club, Abbeyleix Athletic Soccer Club and the CYMS hall.

## Morrissey's

The original shop which opened in 1775 was a small thatched single storey house which operated as a general store. The business flourished and the present building was erected during the first half of the last century.

The 19th century delivery bicycle now retired can be seen high above your head as you sit and savour the warm atmosphere created by the pot bellied iron stove used to heat the building and antique artifacts and advertisements dating back to the early 19th century. The staff still wear the traditional white coats, reminiscent of the garments worn by barstaff back in the 19th century.

## The Market House

The Original Market House was built in 1836 by John the 2nd Viscount de Vesci. It consisted of a single storey construction and was used for the weighing of produce and the storing of grain. In 1896 it was remodelled in Vernacular Italianate by Howard Ince while he was working on Lord de Vesci's House. In 1906 the building was renovated and extended into the structure that can be seen today.

## Memorial of the 2nd Viscount

An obelisk set on a robust rusticated plinth in the centre of the market-square. Designed in 1860 by J.S. Butler, it was to commemorate the help which the de Vesci family gave to the people of Abbeyleix during the famine. The Viscount in order to lessen the hardships of the times reduced all rents, the less property held the greater the reduction.

## The Courthouse

Built in the 19th Century. It was owned by the Grand Jury. It served as a court house until 1970. Today in private ownership it still remains an imposing part of the townscape.



Heritage House, Abbeyleix.

## Kilbeggan Races

- a truly Irish occasion

The going is good at Kilbeggan. The quiet midlands town is transformed on race evenings into a festival of social and sporting pleasure, drawing admirers from every corner of Ireland. You can meet friends, circulate freely; you can eat drink or cheer without restriction, you can bring the family or whoever; where for your few pounds the odds are much better than a lottery ticket; and where you can boast afterwards it was sheer skill that made you pick the winner

## KILBEGGAN RACES

1988 EVENING RACE MEETINGS

July . . . . . Friday, 17th

August . . . . . Friday, 7th

August . . . . . Friday, 21st

September . . . . . Friday, 4th

Admission: Adults £6.

Discount for groups.

Free Car Park

A Truly Irish Occasion



# Spoilt for choice

*A wide variety of choice exists to satisfy your hunger. From high class restaurants, where you can relax in a convivial atmosphere to quality pubs and cafes providing first class fare at budget prices. Excellent premises exist for people requiring light snacks and fast food outlets are second to none. There is a menu and choice to suit every pocket and taste.*

## • Hotel • Restaurants • Cafés

### ABBEYLEIX

#### **Heritage House (Coffee Shop)**

Ballyroan Rd, Abbeyleix  
0502 31653

#### **Capri Grill (Take-Away)**

Main St, Abbeyleix  
0502 31799

#### **Guinn's tea and Coffee Room**

Main St, Abbeyleix  
0502 31020

#### **Sue Ryder Restaurant**

Main St, Abbeyleix  
0502 30037

#### **The Hibernian Hotel**

Lower Main Street, Abbeyleix  
0502 31252

#### **Booth's Delicatessen & Court Yard Restaurant**

Portlaoise  
0502 20312

#### **Franklin's Restaurant**

Laois Shopping Centre, Portlaoise  
0502 61580

#### **The Foodhall**

#### **(Coffee Shop/Restaurant)**

Hynd's Square, Portlaoise  
0502 32616

#### **Egan's Hostelry (Restaurant)**

24 Main St, Portlaoise  
0502 21106

#### **Lucky Palace**

#### **(Chinese Restaurant/Take-Away)**

3 Meehan House, Fintan Lawlor  
Ave, Portlaoise  
0502 60758

#### **Portlaoise Chinese Restaurant**

2 Church Ave., Portlaoise  
0502 22873

#### **Treacy's (Restaurant)**

The Heath, Portlaoise  
0502 46539

#### **Dowling's (Coffee Shop)**

77 Main St, Portlaoise  
0502 22770

#### **Kate's Diner (Restaurant)**

6 Meehan House, Fintan Lawlor  
Ave, Portlaoise

0502 61969

#### **Pine Café**

Lyster Square, Portlaoise  
0502 60622

#### **Kelton Bakeries (Coffee Shop)**

Kelton House, Portlaoise  
0502 21241

#### **Rose's Pantry (Coffee Shop)**

Bridge Street Centre, Portlaoise  
0502 20196

#### **Nino's Restaurant**

Main Street, Portlaoise  
0502 22840

#### **Kingfisher**

#### **(Indian Restaurant)**

Old Bank, Main Street, Portlaoise  
0502 62500/62899

#### **Supermac's (Take-Away)**

Portlaoise  
0502 60893

#### **The Gandon Inn**

Emo, Portlaoise, Co Laois  
0502 26533

#### **The Killashin Hotel**

Dublin Rd, Portlaoise  
0502 21663

#### **The Montague Hotel**

Emo, Portlaoise  
0502 26229

#### **O'Loughlin's Hotel**

Main Street, Portlaoise  
0502 21305

The Square, Durrow

0502 36544

#### **The Castle Arms Hotel**

The Square, Durrow  
0502 36117

### PORTARLINGTON

#### **Matthew's Home Baking**

#### **(Coffee Shop)**

Main Street, Portarlington  
0502 23229

#### **The East End Hotel**

Main St, Portarlington  
0502 23225

### BALLYBRITTAS

#### **Plumes Restaurant**

Ballybrittas, Portlaoise  
0502 26178

#### **The Road House (Restaurant)**

Ballintogher, Ballybrittas  
0502 26453

### STRADBALLY

#### **The Court Restaurant**

Main St, Stradbally

0502 25519

### BORRIS-IN-OSSORY

#### **Leix County Hotel**

Main Street, Borris-in-Ossory

0505 41213

### MOUNTMELICK

#### **Nora's Bakery (Coffee Shop)**

The Square, Mountmelick  
0502 24780

#### **The Old Mill Restaurant**

Irish Town, Mountmelick  
0502 24525

### PORTLAOISE

#### **Bellamy's (Restaurant)**

Main St, Portlaoise  
0502 22303

### DURROW

#### **Woodview Restaurant**

Durrow

0502 36433

#### **The Copper Kettle (Coffee Shop)**

## Billy Dee's Lounge

12 MARKET SQUARE,  
PORTLAOISE

Lunches Served 12-3

Good Drink • Good Food

All Welcome



## Bergin's Traditional Bar

80 Main Street,  
Portlaoise



# Spoilt for choice

## • Pubs Serving Food •

<b>The Anvil Inn</b> Main Street, Portarlinton, Co Laois Hot food served form 12pm to 3pm 6 days a week 0502 23131	<b>The Horseshoe Inn</b> The Square, Abbeyleix, Co Laois Lunch served all day - 7 days a week 0502 31667
<b>Bellamys</b> Main Street, Portlaoise, Co Laois Food served all day 0502 22303	<b>House of the Gaels</b> Ballacolla, Co Laois Sandwiches all day - 7 days a week 0502 34037
<b>Casey's</b> 21 Market Square, Portlaoise, Co Laois Lunch served all day 0502 21483	<b>Mellick Inn</b> 37 Patrick Street, Mountmellick, Co Laois Lunch all day 7 days a week 0502 24360
<b>The Continental Lounge</b> Main Street, Portarlinton, Co Laois 0502 23765 Soup and Sandwiches served form 10.30pm to 2pm 5 days a week	<b>Morrissey's</b> Main Street, Abbeyleix, Co Laois Sandwiches 7 days a week 0502 31233
<b>Donoghue's</b> 24 Market Square, Portlaoise, Co Laois Lunch 12.00 - 3.00 5 days a week 0502 21199	<b>Portlaoise Arms</b> 6 Market Square, Portlaoise, Co Laois Lunch 12noon to 3pm 5 days a week 0502 60165
<b>The Druid</b> Parnell Street, Mountmellick, Co Laois Lunch 12.00 - 3.00 6 days a week 0502 44080	<b>Spa Inn</b> Market Square, Portarlinton, Co Laois Lunch until 4pm 6 days a week 0502 23757
<b>The Eagles Rest</b> Main Street, Abbeyleix, Co Laois 0502 31278 Lunches and dinners all day 7 days a week	<b>Thatched Village Inn</b> Coolrain, Co Laois Quality home made fare is available to the hungry traveller 0502 35080
<b>Farrell's</b> The Square, Mountmellick, Co Laois 0502 24145 Lunches 6 days a week	<b>Treacy's</b> The Heath, Portlaoise, Co Laois Breakfast 7am to 12noon, Lunch 12pm-3pm & A la Carte menu until 9.30pm 7 days a week 0502 46539
<b>The Folk House</b> Main Street, Abbeyleix, Co Laois 0502 31347 Lunch 12.00 - 9.00 7 days a week	<b>White's Pub</b> 81 Main Street, Portlaoise, Co Laois Lunch from 12noon - 5 days a week 0502 21531
<b>Hume's</b> Main Street, Portlaoise, Co Laois Lunch from 12.30 7 days a week 0502 21287	

Welcome to



**VICARSTOWN INN**  
 Vicarstown, Portlaoise,  
 Co. Laois, Ireland.  
 Phone: 0502 - 25189



Irish tourist Board  
 and A.A. Approved.

Fully Licensed.

**B/B £16.50 (Sharing) - EnSuite £18.50**

## Eamon A-Chnoic

RAHEEN, ABBEYLEIX  
 Phone 0502-31109

### Luxury Lounge Old Style Bar

Music & Dancing Every Weekend  
 Traditional Night every Monday Night  
 Ceili and Set Dancing Wednesday Night

# ENTERTAINMENT

## *Traditional, Live & Nightclubs in County Laois*

OTD: Old Time Dancing SDC: Set Dancing Classes L: Live T: Traditional C: Country N: Niteclubs

Music provided for groups and tours by the  
Thatched Village Inn, Coolrain, Co Laois 0502 35080 as requested.

### MONDAY

- |     |                                                    |            |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------|------------|
| (L) | Sally Gardens, 66 Main St., Portlaoise, Co., Laois | 0502 21658 |
| (T) | "Eamonn a Chnoic", Raheen, Abbeyleix, Co., Laois   | 0502 31109 |
| (T) | Anchor Inn, Vicarstown, Co. Laois                  | 0502 25252 |
| (T) | The Horseshoe Inn, The Sq., Abbeyleix, Co., Laois  | 0502 31667 |

### TUESDAY

- |       |                                             |            |
|-------|---------------------------------------------|------------|
| (OTD) | Montague Hotel, Emo, Portlaoise, Co., Laois | 0502 26145 |
| (T)   | The Final Furlong, Ballybrittas, Co. Laois  | 0502 26171 |

### WEDNESDAY

- |       |                                                  |            |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------|------------|
| (SDC) | "Eamonn a Chnoic", Raheen, Abbeyleix, Co., Laois | 0502 31109 |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------|------------|

### THURSDAY

- |       |                                                       |            |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| (OTD) | Killeshin Hotel, Dublin Rd., Portlaoise, Co., Laois   | 0502 21663 |
| (SDC) | The Fisherman's Inn, Ballybrittas, Co. Laois          | 0502 26488 |
| (T)   | The Fountain House, Mountrath, Co. Laois              | 0502 32330 |
| (L)   | Sally Gardens, 66 Main St., Portlaoise, Co., Laois    | 0502 21658 |
| (T)   | "Seans", 11 Market Sq., Portlaoise, Co. Laois         | 0502 21117 |
| (N)   | "Club Spice", Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise, Co. Laois  | 0502 21663 |
| (N)   | Club 23 "O'Loughins Hotel, 30 Main Street, Portlaoise | 0502 21305 |
| (T)   | Thatched Village Inn, Coolrain, Co Laois              | 0502 35080 |

### FRIDAY

- |     |                                                       |            |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| (L) | Spa Inn, Market Sq., Portlaoise, Co., Laois           | 0502 23757 |
| (T) | The Fisherman's Inn, Ballybrittas, Co. Laois          | 0502 26488 |
| (T) | Bellamys, Main St., Portlaoise, Co., Laois            | 0502 22303 |
| (N) | "Club Spice", Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise, Co., Laois | 0502 21663 |
| (N) | Club 23 "O'Loughins Hotel, 30 Main Street, Portlaoise | 0502 21305 |
| (N) | Pedigree Corner, Ballylinan, Co. Laois                | 0502 25204 |

### SATURDAY

- |     |                                                  |            |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------|------------|
| (C) | The Deadmans, Okonroe, Ballyfin, Co. Laois       | 0502 55388 |
| (L) | The Park Inn, Emo, Portlaoise, Co., Laois        | 0502 46515 |
| (T) | "Eamonn a Chnoic", Raheen, Abbeyleix, Co., Laois | 0502 31109 |

- |     |                                                       |            |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| (T) | Dunnes Bar, Stradbally, Co., Laois                    | 0502 25114 |
| (L) | Vicarstown Inn, Vicarstown, Co., Laois                | 0502 25189 |
| (L) | The Folkhouse, Abbeyleix, Co., Laois                  | 0502 31347 |
| (T) | Bellamys, Main St., Portlaoise, Co. Laois             | 0502 22303 |
| (L) | House of Gaels, Ballacolla, Co., Laois                | 0502 34037 |
| (L) | Ryans Pub, The Sq., Ballinakill, Co., Laois           | 0502 33346 |
| (N) | "Club Spice", Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise, Co. Laois  | 0502 21663 |
| (N) | Club 23 "O'Loughins Hotel, 30 Main Street, Portlaoise | 0502 21305 |
| (N) | The Leix County Hotel, Borris-in-Ossory, Co. Laois    | 0502 41213 |
| (T) | Thatched Village Inn, Coolrain, Co Laois              | 0502 35080 |

### SUNDAY

- |     |                                                  |            |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------|------------|
| (T) | Bellamys, Main St., Portlaoise, Co. Laois        | 0502 22303 |
| (L) | The Nore Nets, Chapel St. Durrrow, Co. Laois     | 0502 36280 |
| (T) | "Eamonn a Chnoic", Raheen, Abbeyleix, Co., Laois | 0502 31109 |
| (L) | The Folkhouse, Main St., Abbeyleix, Co., Laois   | 0502 31347 |
| (L) | Vicarstown Inn, Vicarstown, Co., Laois           | 0502 25189 |
| (T) | Dunnes Bar, Stradbally, Co. Laois                | 0502 25114 |
| (c) | Lewis's, Main St., Portlaoise, Co. Laois         | 0502 22827 |
| (N) | The Castle Arms Hotel, Durrrow, Co. Laois        | 0502 36117 |
| (N) | Pedigree Corner, Ballylinan, Co., Laois          | 0502 25204 |
| (T) | The Fisherman's Inn, Ballybrittas, Co. Laois     | 0502 26488 |
| (T) | Hume, Main St. Portlaoise, Co Laois              | 0502 21287 |



Donaghmore Workhouse Museum, Donaghmore, Co. Laois.

## Bernard Kavanagh

LICENSED VINTNER

Monument  
House,  
Mountmellick

TRADITIONAL  
IRISH pub



## The Wolf Pack

Old Style  
Traditional Bar

Phone 0502-35668

# A brief historic tour of County Laois

## Ballaghmore Castle

Was built in 1480 by the Gaelic Chieftain MacGillpatrick (now called Fitzpatrick), meaning son of the servant of Patrick. Lords of Upper Ossory, they defended North Munster, strategically placed as they were on the old Irish road. A Sheela-na-Gig carved in stone is on the front south facing wall, a pagan fertility symbol to ward off evil. The castle fell into disuse until the present owners bought in 1990 and restored it. Ballaghmore Castle can be rented weekly or weekends for private parties, weddings etc. Self-catering or staffed. Telephone 0505 24153

## Donaghmore Workhouse Museum

Experience the dramatic and moving story of Ireland's poor as you wander through these restored workhouse buildings. The museum is housed in the restored Donaghmore Union Workhouse (1853-1886) and includes a workhouse museum and extensive agricultural museum spanning 150 years of local history.

Contact: Manager 0505 46212

## Emo Court

A magnificent neo-classical designed by James Gandon in 1790. It is surrounded by extensive parklands with formal lawns, a lake and woodland lawns.

Tel: 0502 26573

## Heritage House

Travel back in time and discover how our history has been greatly enriched by national and international influences. A visit to the house promises to be relaxing, entertaining and educational. Heritage house is located in the restored 1884 Patrician Monastery. Dramatic images and realistic models are just some of the techniques used in our display. Trace our history from the Neolithic era, to the themes of Gaelic Dynasties, the Cistercians, the deVesci Family to the planned town of Abbeyleix. Witness the recreation of the award winning Abbeyleix "Titanic" Carpet Factory. Other facilities include the coffee parlour, craft shop and tourist information. Telephone 0502 31653

## Other Non-Paying Historic Attractions

### Aghaboe Abbey

6th century Abbey founded by St Canice.

### CARPETS

Huge selection of Canvas and Axminster Carpets in stock.

### HEARTH RUGS

Selection of quality Hearth Rugs - ideal gifts.



## JIM LEONARD CARPETS LTD.

ABBEYLEIX ROAD, PORTLAOISE  
Tel.: (0502) 21582. Open Monday to Saturday

## Coolbanagher Church

Originally part of the Emo Court demesne. The church was designed by James Gandon.

## Donaghmore Village

Ancient village, untouched by modern day life.

## Granstown Lake and Nature Reserve

At Ballacolla

## Killeshin

Once important medieval monastic centre, surviving ruins including one of the finest Romanesque Doorway in the country.

## Rock of Dunamase

Ruined remains of ancient fortification used by waves of invading armies from Ireland and England.

## Round Tower of Timahoe

12th century round tower with impressively decorated romanseque doorway on ancient monastic site, founded in 7th century by St Mochua.

## Sexton's House

Abbeyleix

## TAXI SERVICES

### Portlaoise Taxi Service

**GALVINS**

Dial Direct to Car  
Phone

087 2557799

Early Till Late

Office: 25 Lake Glen  
PORTLAOISE



Phone/Fax: (0502) 22417

## Whelan's Taxi Service

Phone  
087-2545911



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## BUS HIRE E&E Moore

BALLYPICKAS, BALLINAKILL, SPINK

Bus Hire available for all occasions



# Miller's Hardware

Coliseum Lane, Portlaoise. 0502-21445

## COOKWARE

Great range of quality cookware, stainless steel, cast-iron, Kinox and Le Creuset. Huge range of kitchen utensils and accessories, including all electrical equipment for your kitchen. Contemporary Hornsea Pottery now in stock.

## GLASSWARE

Wide range of traditional and contemporary glasses including Tipperary, Galway and Duisce Glass.

## FURNITURE

New stock of Cane furniture, chairs, coffee tables

and plant stands. Casual furniture; magazine racks, phone tables, towel racks. Also a large range of mirrors and pictures now in stock.

## DIY GIFTS

Tools, tool boxes, rechargeable drills and screwdrivers. We also carry the complete stock of requirements for your decorating needs. Agents for Dulux, Valspar and Berger paints.

## GARDENING

Major range of Tractor Mowers, Husqvarna, Honda, Rally, Alpina and Westwood. Also grass trimmers, hedge trimmers, weed eaters, clearing saws, chainsaws and garden tillers in stock and relevant safety equipment.

## SPECIAL ACCESSORIES

Large selection of sundry gift items to suit birthdays, weddings, anniversaries etc. Golf club and all other organisations catered for and special rates for prizes.



**GIFT VOUCHERS  
AVAILABLE  
SECURE CUSTOMER  
CAR PARKS**

# Supermac's™

Family Restaurant, Portlaoise



- Parties our speciality
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