

ABBEYLEIX
TIDY TOWNS

*Restoration
of
Fountains*



ABBEYLEIX —
THE TOWN OF THE
FOUNTAINS

LAOIS COUNTY LIBRARY



3 0010 00796318 7

6/2

To the People of Abbeyleix

I HAVE recently taken on the position of Chairman of Abbeyleix Tidy Towns. My aim for the forthcoming year is to bring people of different ages and walks of life together in one joint effort. It is my belief that Tidy Towns heightens community and voluntary spirit and makes us proud of our town.

By bringing local business, schools, sporting bodies, clubs, local authorities and state agencies together in a common cause. We must strive for a clean, attractive, well-presented and welcoming environment for visitors and residents alike.

Tidy Towns proves a powerful example to promote and maintain the community spirit of Ireland's towns and villages. From the oldest to the youngest, every member of the community should be involved with tidy towns, after all, the community belongs to everyone.

This year will be no different than the last. We, the members of Abbeyleix Tidy Towns Committee will play a central role in setting, meeting and even exceeding our objectives, which are a greater environmental, community and social development. These objectives will not be achieved without the support and generous contribution of the local community.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee members and the many volunteers who take on the responsibility, hard work and interest in our tidy towns.

"It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness".

I would very much appreciate if you could be part of this initiative in some way and support us in our forthcoming year.

Particular credit to be given to Sean Phelan who spear-headed the restoration project. Without his great tenacity and commitment the Project would not have come to fruition. Our sincere thanks to Laois Leader Rural Development Company for their great support.

Thanks to the Heritage Officer Catherine Casey for her help and encouragement. Jackie and Christy A.P.C.D. who are always willing to offer a helping hand. Michael Lynch Cait Abbeyleix Cris Uys A.R.E.A. who supplied much needed information.

Finally, many thanks to the very hardworking committee who contribute so much individually. Very special thanks to Kay and Jimmy Maher who have shown great commitment over the years to Tidy Towns, our very vigilant treasurer Tom Lawlor who spreads himself in so many directions. To our hard-working secretary Maura Whelan who always manages to administer her office in an efficient and good-humoured manner.

*Thanking you,
MICHAEL MORRISSEY,
Chairman.*

THINGS WE NEED YOU TO DO:

1. Get involved – be part of the team.
2. Be responsible for your litter.
3. Sweep, clean, paint and decorate your property.
4. Pick up and dispose of litter when you see it.
5. Report illegal dumping.
6. Recycle your waste.
7. Compost your waste.
8. If the bin is full – empty it.
9. From 1st June display your flower baskets and window boxes.
10. Report vandalism.

ABBEYLEIX HERITAGE TOWN

ABBEYLEIX as we know it to-day owes its existence to John Vesey the 2nd Viscount. At the time of his accession the Abbeyleix village lay closer to the estate near the site on the former Cistercian Monastery from whence the town gets its name. The area was very damp and had poor drainage. The 2nd Viscount decided to level the old village and re-locate it eastwards onto drier ground.

He energetically set about attracting and constructing the infrastructure of the town.

In 1830 the new Abbeyleix had its own flour mill, brewery post office, courthouse Police Station market house, infirmary, two churches and two woollen mills. It was observed by J.M.Grower, a traveller of the time that Abbeyleix was one of the neatest and most pleasing places in Leinster. A similar sentiment was echoed by The Irish Times in 2000 when Abbeyleix was described as The Gem of the Midlands.

The Progressive attitude to innovation was shared by the 3rd Viscount and his wife Emma. They helped build schools and expand churches, they donated sites to attract new industries, they laid water pipes to supply the new town with a fresh water supply.

It was not possible to extend the supply to the households in Rathmoyle because of the steep hill so they erected a fountain at the junction on the Ballyroan rd which as well as providing a much needed water supply, provided a venue for many social gatherings. A celebratory bonfire was lit in the fountain on one occasion and caused a big crack in the trough.

Abbeyleix was designated a Heritage Town under the Operational Programme for Tourism 1994-1999. It is unquestionably one of the finest planned estate towns in the country. Abbeyleix was once a thriving market Town it still has a casual trading area in the Market Square. Every Saturday local producers display a colourful array of their home produced products and provide local and passing customers with delicious fruit and vegetables.

RESTORATION OF FOUNTAINS

FOUNTAIN OF THE NORTH MONASTERY SCHOOL

THE Fountain was erected by the De Vesce family in the middle of the 18th century to provide fresh water for the residence of Rathmoyle and the area known as The Tiles on the Portlaoise Road. It is made of limestone, previously it had a metal grid surround and a handle to hold the buckets while filling the water. It was damaged while being removed to allow for road modifications in the nineteen eighties. The fountain may have lost some of its original features but nonetheless it looks majestic in its present setting.



Site of fountain at the North Monastery before it was removed in 1980's.



Relocated North Monastery fountain

MEMORIAL OF THE 2nd VISCOUNT (MARKET SQUARE)

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 Vesce 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. It is one of several fountains in the town that has given the town such a pleasant appearance.



Memorial to the 2nd Viscount

MEMORIAL TO THE 3rd VISCOUNT [BALLACOLLA ROAD JUNCTION]

A GOTHIC octagonal shrine built after a competition in 1877, to the design of Rawson Carroll by Lady Emma de Vesce in remembrance of her late husband Tomas the 3rd Viscount.

The following is a description of said fountain taken from the Leinster Express September 21st 1878 –

“The design of the memorial – a drinking fountain – is Gothic. The first storey stands on a raised platform of cut stone, with steps. It is square in plan with buttresses at each angle, and furnished at the top by pinnacles with beautifully carved finials. Each side has a trefoil-headed panel with deeply cut mouldings and polished limestone shafts. Immediately above the lower storey the angles of the square are cut off to form an octagon having richly panelled band course on a base for the upper part. This storey is open with eight limestone pillars, surrounding a central one, with moulded bases, and carved tops, from which spring pointed and moulded arches, forming the outer part, and corbelled groining connected with the central pillar.



Memorial to the 3rd Viscount

“Above these arches is a carved cornice, from which rises an octagon spire, ornamented by carved bands of Portland stone, forming an exquisite contrast with the granite in the main building. At the upper part there are four open gables, and the whole is finished with a wrought iron terminal of a coronet form. In one of the niches of the ground storey (that facing the town) is the fountain; the niche facing the Durrow road bears a shield, with the de Vesce arms; while that facing the station has the inscription recording the object for which the memorial is erected.

“The architect was Mr. Rawson Carroll, F.R.I.B.A. Dublin, of the beauty of whose design we have already spoken, and of the satisfactory manner in which the work was carried out by Mr. Sharpe, of Great Brunswick Street”.

WINGFIELD MEMORIAL [BALLACOLLA ROAD]

THE inscription reads “In Memory of the Honourable and Reverend William Wingfield, Vicar of Abbeyleix 1836 -1880”. Not only did the Reverend Wingfield serve for a remarkable 44 years as Vicar of Abbeyleix but he also saw remarkable changes in his own parish church building. This is the



Wingfield Memorial

vicar who was appointed shortly after the completion of the Semple Church and oversaw the reconstruction of the church under Sir Thomas Wyatt in the 1860's. His time also spans the development of Abbeyleix under the De Vesce's to the rise of Irish Nationalism in the later part of the 19th Century.

FOUNTAIN AT LITTLE BALLADINE, ABBEYLEIX

DURING our research little was uncovered about the history of this fountain. We do know that it was used to supply water to the households on the Mountrath Road, also it provided a drinking trough for the animals on market day. It was restored by Tidy Towns in 2001 and is kept in pristine condition by one committed resident Liam Mahony.



Fountain at Little Balladine

The fountain was not operational for a number of years because the old lead pipe system had corroded and seized up. Originally the fountains were water fed by gravity. This system has been replaced by circulating pumps. Each fountain has a common feature, the water that comes through the centre is fed through the mouth of a Gargoyle.

It is possible that much of the Limestone was sourced locally because the De Vesce family had their own quarry. The decorative urns at the front of Abbeyleix House were designed by local craftsmen from the adjoining quarry.

CONSERVATION

EACH year the Tidy Towns Report highlights our lack of a wildlife area. It is our intention to make a huge effort this year. The large area fronting the Killamuck bog is a prime example of what could be done to conserve and preserve a natural habit for wildlife.

The survey that was carried out on behalf of A.R.E.A. in their effort to preserve the bog gives credence to such a project.

We all have a responsibility to leave the face of nature intact for future generations. For instance did you know that the beautiful butterflies almost became extinct in the 1950s. This was due to the indiscriminate use of insecticide. If this is not to happen again we need to educate ourselves on safe methods of conservation if not the grand appearance of the large white, the Red Admiral, the Tortoiseshell or the Peacock butterflies making their appearance from April right through to August will become but a memory.

When developing your garden you might consider planting some flowers and shrubs that will attract butterflies.

The most popular shrub for attracting butterflies is the Buddleia but is a very invasive shrub and has to be severely pruned each year.

Stinging nettles provide a breeding area for the Tortoiseshell, Peacock and the Red Admirals. Plants that attract are Lavender, Lobelia, Aubretia, Verbana, Phlox Candtuft and Honeysuckle.

Please read carefully through the list of Laois Butterflies kindly supplied by Gilly Walsh-Kemmis and see how many you can identify.

I do hope you have a better understanding of the task ahead. Remember, in order to achieve our objectives we all have a very important role to play.

LAOIS BUTTERFLIES

BUTTERFLY	ADULT	FOODPLANT
Dingy Skipper	Ap, My, Jn, Aug, Sp	Birds Foot Trefoil
Wood White	May-August	Pea Family (vetch etc.)
Brimstone	All	Buckthorn
Large White	April-October	Cabbage, Nasturtium
Small White	March-October	Cabbage Family
Green-veined	March-August	Garlic Mustard, Cuckoo flower
Orange Tip	April-June	G m, c f, Sweet Rocket
Green Hairstreak	May-July	Gorse, Rock Rose, Trefoil, Broom, Bramble, Hawkweed
Small Copper	April-November	Sorrel, Dock
Small Blue	May/Jun, Aug/Sep	Kidney Vetch
Common Blue	May-October	Clover, Bird's foot trefoil
Holly Blue	March-September	Holly, Ivy, Gorse
Red Admiral	All	Stinging Nettle
Painted Lady	May-October	Thistle, Stinging nettle
Small Tortoiseshell	All	Stinging Nettle
Silver-washed Fritillary	July-September	Violet
Speckled Wood	March-October	Coarse Grasses
Wall Brown	May-October	Coarse Grasses
Meadow Brown	June-October	Coarse Grasses
Small Heath	May-October	Grasses
Ringlet	June-August	Coarse Grasses
Clouded Yellow	Rathdowney area	Clovers

	Wet			Bog		
	Track	Carr	Cutaway	Bog	Wood	Total
Trees/shrubs	11	25	6	11	15	29
Woody-stemmed species	10	10	8	9	8	14
Herbaceous plants	107	55	65	18	21	149
Grasses	22	13	12	3	5	32
Rushes	5	1	8	8	5	12
Sedges	2	6	16	7	3	22
Ferns	5	8	2	3	8	15
Horsetails	2	2	2	0	2	4
Mosses	1	10	1	27	2	37
Liverworts	0	3	0	9	0	12
Lichens & Algae	0	3	0	18	2	21
Fungi	1	2	0	1	8	10
TOTAL	160	136	114	108	77	358
Mammals	2	4	1	7	0	9
Birds	5	8	5	13	7	20
Amphibians	1	1	1	2	1	2
Fish	0	0	1	0	0	1
Insects	32	12	17	51	11	116
Molluses	0	26	26	2	0	27
TOTAL	34	44	48	65	12	174

SECTION 7 - NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The Abbeyleix site is an area of 197.9 ha (489 acres) 1 km to the south of Abbeyleix town along the N8 Dublin-Cork road. It contains a typical small intact raised bog of 123 hectares (303.8 acres) and 74.9 hectares (185 acres) of handcut turbary surrounded by some poor fen to the east, swamp carr to the north and coniferous forestry planted onto the bog's old lagg zone around the rest. This is mainly composed of Scots pine but also some Norway spruce and lodgepole pine. The bog is also bisected by the old Kilkenny-Portlaoise railway line which supports a substantial diversity of meadow habitats. The high bog has been drained since 1986 by 41 km of field drains installed by Bórd na Móna as a prerequisite to peat-moss harvesting. The present study listed the flora and fauna of (a) the high bog, (b) the cutaway, (c) the railway track, (d) the swamp carr and (e) the bog woodland. The vegetation communities of the high bog area (west and east) were also studied using 1m² quadrats and statistical analysis.

(A) High Bog (Section 2.2)

53 species of plants were identified on the bog including all of the main species typical of lowland raised bog in the British Isles and several species of liverwort typical of Irish Midland raised bogs. The results of the quadrat survey demonstrated that there are significant differences between the bog to the west and east of the track. To the east it can still be considered active raised bog with substantial areas of actively-growing hummocks of *Sphagnum* moss (*Sphagnum* was present in 72% of the quadrats) and rich bog vegetation communities (of types M18, M2 and M3 according to NVC classification). To the west it is badly degraded and contains a 'para-bog' vegetation with much more heather and much less of the crucial *Sphagnum* moss so that although *Sphagna* was present in 44% of the quadrats they had a much lower cover value. 21 species of vertebrate were recorded with the commonest species the meadow pipit, skylark, Irish hare and frog. The most notable from a conservation perspective were the otter *Lutra lutra* and the merlin *Falco columbarius*. 50 species of invertebrate were recorded including dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies, moths, beetles, grasshoppers and groundhoppers typical of raised bog habitats. The most important of these were the green tiger beetle *Cicindela campestris* and the black darter dragonfly *Sympetrum danae* and emerald damselfly *Lestes sponsa*.

(B) Cutaway (Section 2.3)

The main area surveyed has a fen meadow-type vegetation dominated by *Carex* (sedge) species of which there are 16 and containing a rich mix of meadow, wetland, bog and woodland herbs. A total of 100 plant species were identified here including betony, a protected species in the Irish Red Data Book. This area supports a large and diverse community of *Lepidoptera* (butterflies and moths), *Orthoptera* (grasshoppers and groundhoppers), *Odonata* (dragonflies and damselflies) and molluscs (snails and slugs). The most important species present are Annex II species the marsh fritillary butterfly *Eurodryas aurinia* and the mollusc *Vertigo moulinsiana*.

(C) Railway track (Section 2.4)

This has a very rich mix of mainly meadow species of neutral, acid and alkaline grasslands but also species of woodland, wetland/fen and disturbed ground. A total of 171 species including 107 herbs, 22 grasses, 4 rushes, 2 sedges, 4 fern species, 2 horsetails and one moss were recorded here. Water avens, quaking grass, creeping soft-grass, 14 species of leguminous plants, milkwort, common centuary, eyebright, yellow rattle, field scabious, golden rod, black knapweed and spotted orchids are among the most interesting species present. The same diversity of herbs and grasses supports a similar diversity of insects particularly *Lepidoptera* (butterflies and moths) including 15 of Ireland's 31 species of butterfly. The rarest of these are the Annex II marsh fritillary, silver-washed fritillary, green hair-streak and common blue.

(D) Swamp Carr (Section 2.5)

This contains 25 tree species, 10 woody-stemmed species and 55 herbs mainly a mix of woodland and wetland species. The canopy ranges from drier ash woodland at the main entrance to swamp carr dominated by alder and willow species further into the site containing areas of tussock sedge swamp. One tree species, the bird cherry, is listed as rare in the Irish Red Data Book and one herb, common wintergreen and the marsh fern were previously unrecorded in the county of Laois. A rich diversity of vertebrate and invertebrate species must be present here.

(E) Bog Woodland

Most of the area surveyed was covered by mature Scots pine trees planted in the nineteenth century with an understorey of birch and holly and a herb and moss layer of bog and wetland species. One plant species unique to this habitat on the site is the royal fern and the most interesting animal species are the black darter dragonfly and grayling butterfly.

Other Bog System Invertebrates (Section 3)

Invertebrate species associated with bog pools and common bog plants were assessed including heather, cross-leaved heath, gorse, willow and birch species, bracken, bog myrtle, Sphagnum mosses, sundew, cottongrass species, bilberry, devil's-bit scabious and grass species. This identified a potential of 500 animal species in addition to the 165 already identified. Furthermore, there are an additional 300 or more plant species not covered by this list of bog plants so it can be speculated that there are at least another several hundred invertebrate species on-site.

Bog Restoration (Section 4)

There are many successful examples of bog restoration including severely damaged commercially-milled sites in the UK and at Clara, Sharavogue and Raheenmore Bogs in Ireland with the first two of these Irish sites in similar condition to Abbeyleix when conservation work was started. Abbeyleix has been damaged by hand-cutting through the centuries, reclamation of lagg by tree-planting, the construction of a railway line and drainage work by Bord na Mona from 1986-97. These effects but particularly the latter have lowered the bog's water table and reduced the surface moisture content from over 95% to below 85% causing significant damage to the bog surface acrotelm, particularly on the west side and (to a much lesser extent) on the east side. Continued development work by Bord na Mona would completely obliterate all flora and fauna of the high bog and cutaway areas, severely impact the flora and fauna of the old railway track and probably negatively impact the surrounding swamp carr, lagg and bog woodland areas. It would also release approximately 140,000 tonnes of carbon from long-term storage and perhaps an additional one and a half times that amount if the after-use is pasture. Alternatively, the site would be relatively easily restored and managed as a unique nature reserve, amenity, tourism and education area. Restoration would

involve hand-blocking of most of the drains, some machine work to block larger channels and removal of invading birch and pine seedlings. The track and fen-meadow habitats could be mowed to increase floristic diversity and natural interest. Monitoring and recording of vegetation would be required to assess the success of the bog restoration and monitoring of invertebrate and bird populations and composition would also be very useful.

Legislation

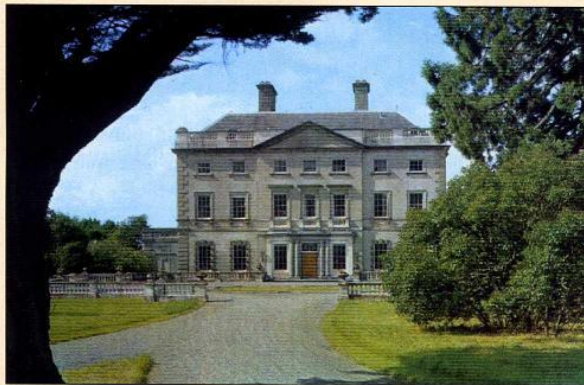
Protection of species and habitats on the Abbeyleix site fall under two pieces of European legislation, the Birds and Habitats Directive, two conventions, the 'Bern' and the 'Bonn' and the Irish Wildlife Act 1976.

SECTION 8 - CONCLUSION

The Abbeyleix site contains a number of habitats of international importance including active raised bog (7110) listed as a priority habitat in the Habitats Directive Annex I and the Annex I habitats, degraded raised bog (capable of natural regeneration: 7120). There are also smaller areas that possibly fall under the category of Atlantic wet heath (4010) and mesophile grasslands while the wet woodland/carr possibly constitutes another priority habitat, alluvial forests (91EO). In addition there is at least one and possibly two Annex II animal species, the marsh fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia* and the mollusc *Vertigo moulinsiana*, two Irish Red Data Book plant species, betony *Betonica officinalis* and bird cherry *Prunus padus* and two new species for the county of Laois, marsh fern *Thelypteris palustris* and common wintergreen *Pyrola minor*. These are just a handful of the rarest of the 358 plant species and 174 animal species identified by surveys to date and these essentially only in one summer season over a limited area (probably about one-third to one half) of the site. Consequently, the very significant ecological and biodiversity value of the site has only begun to be uncovered. The Abbeyleix site was previously listed as a proposed Natural Heritage Area but was later de-listed on the basis of an anonymous Duchas report. Its large size (198 ha) and mix of internationally-threatened habitats and species discovered by this survey all adjoining proposed Special Areas of Conservation such as the Nore river and Cappolellan Wood surely make it a unique remnant of our natural heritage which should be preserved for present and future generations through re-designation as a Special Area of Conservation.

Perhaps the best way to conclude is with a statement given by the world-famous environmental scientist Dr James Lovelock in relation to Abbeyleix bog:-

'Peat bogs are believed to be the final stage of succession coming after forests. They are ecosystems of prime importance. Before using the resources they represent in short-term interest, a wealthy nation should take thought and consider what part of an irreplaceable heritage they may lose.'



Abbleix House, built by Sir William Chambers in 1773 for Thomas Vesey, first Viscount De Vesce.

Thanks to . . .

