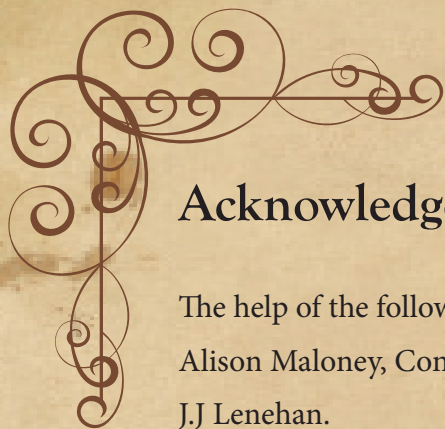


A History of Oak Park





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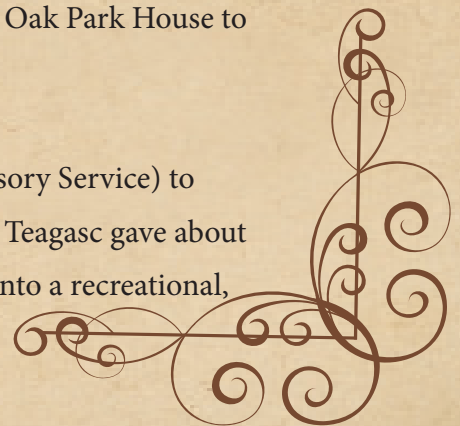
Introduction

Oak Park or Painestown Estate dates back to the early 1600's and was owned by the Cooke family until 1785 when they sold it to the Bruens. It was Bruen who after seeing the abundance of mighty oaks on the estate promptly changed its name to Oak Park. The Bruens of Oak Park went on to become one of the most influential families in the country. The first Henry Bruen was a member of the Irish Parliament and the next two MP's in Westminster.

There are many historic and architectural features of note within Oak Park. These include Oak Park House, The Grand Arch, the Metal Bridge, the Ice House, the man-made Lake, the Coach House, the Temple, the Dairy, and the Farmyard as well as the ruins of a church and graveyard where some of the Cookes are buried. In the Bruen era Oak Park estate extended to more than 600 hectares.

Following the death of the last Henry Bruen in 1954, the Oak Park Estate was sold to an English farming syndicate in 1957. Two years later it was taken over by The Irish Land Commission who allocated some of the land to small farmers, and the Carlow Golf and Rugby Clubs. An Foras Talúntais which had just come into existence was given 344 hectares, including Oak Park House to be used as a Tillage Crops Research Centre.

In later years An Foras Talúntais amalgamated with ACOT (The National Advisory Service) to form Teagasc. Teagasc headquarters was moved to Oak Park in 2004. In 2006, Teagasc gave about 50 hectares of forestry parkland to the people of Carlow which was developed into a recreational, community and amenity facility.



A History of Oak Park

The first known owners of the Oak Park Estate, then called Painestown, were the Coke Family, later known as Cooke. The family lived at Oak Park from the middle of the 1600's until 1785 and were related to Edward Coke, Lord Chief Justice of England. The most famous Cooke from Painestown was Matthew, who was a Colonel in the army of King James II. He and his brother fled Ireland after the Treaty of Limerick ended the Williamite wars between the Jacobites and the supporters of William of Orange. The brothers later had distinguished careers in the army of King Louis XIV of France. Other members of the Cooke Family were banished to Connaught and a well known descendent was the late Cardinal Cooke of New York.



Oak Park House



Cardinal Cooke

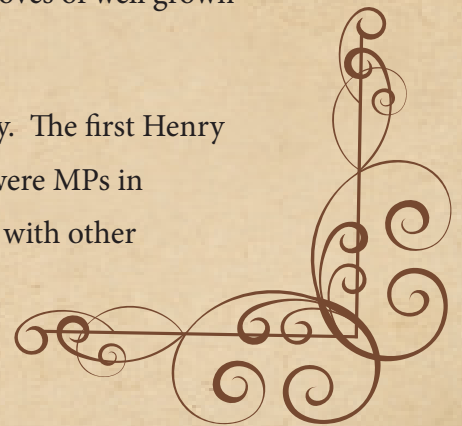


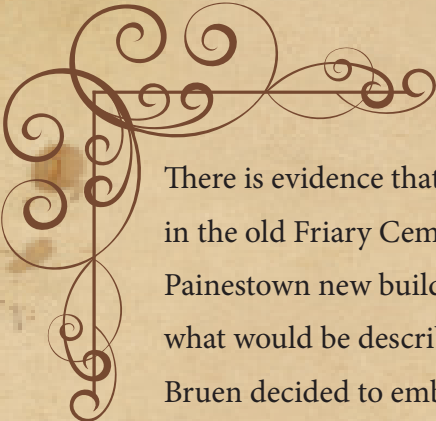
Matthew Cooke

In 1785 the Earl of Kenmare, husband of Anne Cooke the last member of the Cooke family sold the Oak Park Estate of 600 hectares to Henry Bruen. He was the son of Moses Bruen of Abbey Boyle, Co. Roscommon, whose father had come from Tarvin, Chester with the army of Oliver Cromwell and to whom land had been given in County Roscommon. Henry was a former Quartermaster in the British Army fighting in the American War of Independence. Having made his fortune in America he returned to Ireland and proceeded to buy up land in Carlow and the surrounding counties. He was probably introduced to Carlow through his friendship with Benjamin Burton of Burton Hall, both of whom were members of the Irish Parliament for Jamestown, Co. Leitrim. In a short time he had purchased over 10,000 hectares, all or part of 13 parishes in Carlow alone. He was so taken by the beauty of the Nurney and Newtown countryside that he rebuilt the village of Nurney to the design of a 'Traditional English Village'. They retained such an affinity for Nurney that the first three generations of Oak Park Bruens are buried in a vault in the churchyard there.

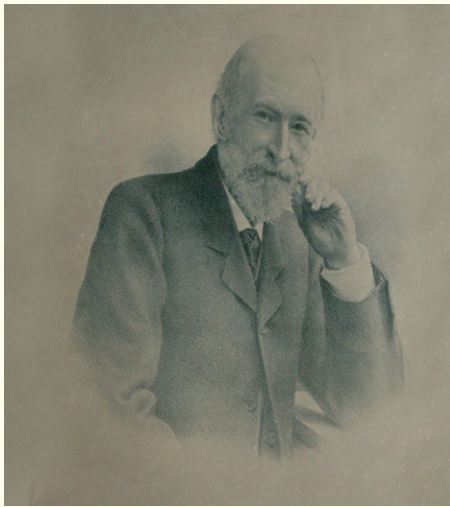
The original Henry Bruen was the first of five 'Henry Bruens' to own Oak Park up to 1957, as the estate was passed down from father to son. It was he who actually changed the name from 'Painestown to Oak Park' because the demesne was 'embellished with stately groves of well grown oak'.

The Bruens of Oak Park were one of the most influential families in the country. The first Henry Bruen was a member of the Irish Parliament in Dublin and the following two were MPs in Westminster. The Bruens further strengthened their position by intermarrying with other powerful families in Leinster, including the Kavanaghs of Borris, and the Connollys of Castletown.

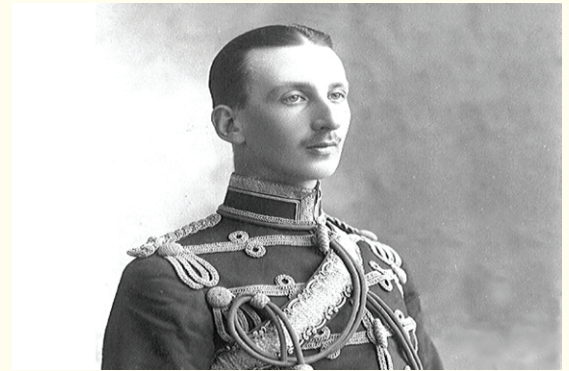




There is evidence that a house of some substance existed in Painestown prior to 1800. A gravestone in the old Friary Cemetery on the Estate records the death in 1781 of "John Nolan, Bricklayer at Painestown new building". In 1815 the house was described as "a neat edifice, but not extensive, what would be described as a fashionable hunting lodge in the English style". The second Henry Bruen decided to embellish it and commissioned well-known architect William V. Morrison to design and construct a villa around the existing building. Morrison was probably introduced to Henry Bruen by his in-laws, the Kavanaghs, whose home, Borris House, Morrison had recently designed. In 1878, the house was enlarged to designs produced by Architects, McCurdy and Mitchell, for the third Henry Bruen. In 1902, during the occupancy of the fourth Henry Bruen, the house was badly damaged by fire but was subsequently reconstructed and improved.



Henry III



Henry V



Henry IV

The Grand Arch

Located on the boundary of the Bruen property, the Grand Arch was the main entrance to the Oak Park Estate. The arch was also a William Morrison design and was constructed at the same time as the second Henry Bruen was upgrading Oak Park House. This structure is the best example in existence of a Morrison-designed Grand Entrance. It contains living accommodation for a gatekeeper and was occupied until 1970.



The Grand Arch



The Metal Bridge

East of Oak Park House there is a cast-iron bridge which spans a man-made lake at its narrowest point. It was designed by George Papworth and constructed in 1819. Papworth was a well-known architect in Dublin at that time being responsible for the design of the Pro-Cathedral and Kingsbridge near the present Heuston Train Station.

The Oak Park bridge was one of the first cast-iron bridges constructed outside Dublin and is supported by ornate granite piers at both sides. It was located on the main entrance road to Oak Park House.



The Metal Bridge

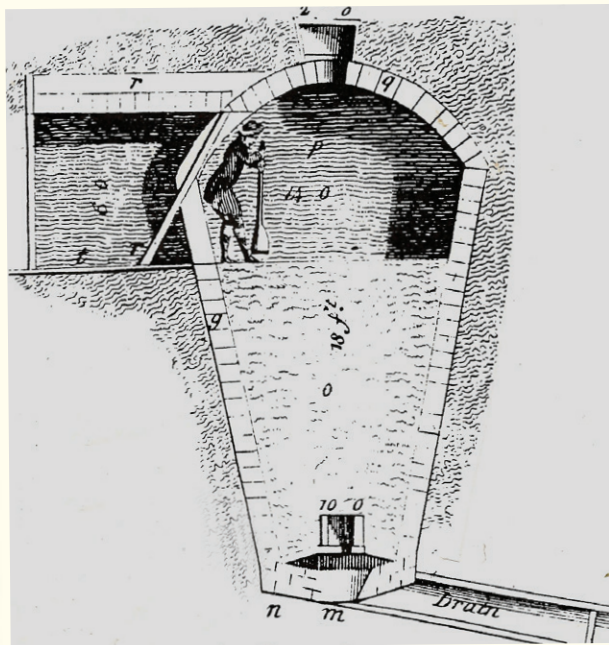
The Ice House

Just north of Oak Park House is a raised mound surrounded by tall beech trees. Beneath this lies the Ice House, an egg-shaped underground chamber, constructed around 1810, which served as a storage area for ice collected from the lake. The Ice House is 6 metres deep and 4 metres wide and is lined with bricks.

Before the era of refrigeration it was the only means of keeping meat and other perishable foods fresh for any length of time.



Entrance to Ice House



Ice House Section



Oak Park Lake

Oak Park Lake, comprising in the region of 8 hectares, is man-made. Every large estate house needed a lake to enhance its status. If one did not exist it had to be constructed.

The lake in Oak Park was excavated in the mid-1840s and the soil removed by horses with pannier baskets. The lake provided ice for the Ice House, ducks for shooting parties, fish for anglers as well as a skating rink for the Bruen family and guests in winter.



Ice Skating on Oak Park Lake (1916)



Oak Park Lake

The ice from the lake was harvested each winter and packed into the ice house. When well compacted the insulation effect of the surrounding soil ensured that the last of the ice did not melt until the following Autumn!

The Dairy

A two-storey granite ashlar building is located in the farmyard. The building was used as a Dairy for processing milk during the Bruen era and has been confirmed as a Morrison design.



The Dairy



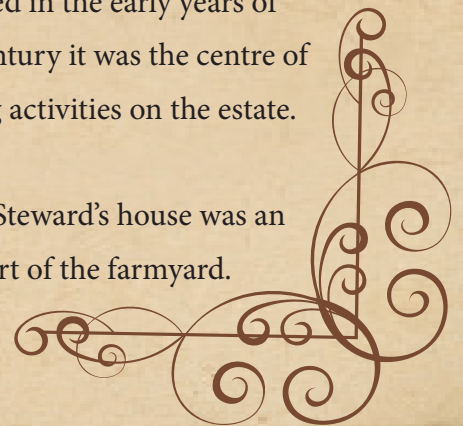
The Farmyard

The Farmyard

Across the road from this building is the farmyard complex.

Constructed in the early years of the 19th century it was the centre of all farming activities on the estate.

The Farm Steward's house was an integral part of the farmyard.



Church and Graveyard

Adjacent to the farmyard is an old graveyard containing the ruins of an ancient church. Within the walls of the church are buried some of the Cooke family, who resided in Oak Park before 1800. The last burial in this graveyard took place in the early 1940's. The origins of the church are unknown but it is most likely that it was a church of worship for the landlords and tenants. A monk from one of the local monasteries would have looked after all their spiritual needs.



Ruins of Church and Graveyard

The Coach House

One of the oldest structures on the estate is the Coach House which was built around 1800.

One wing housed the stables for the horses, the other wing and the centre section, with recessed facade, accommodated the carriages. There was a residence at the rear, probably occupied by the Head-Groom - the other grooms and horsemen lived upstairs, sleeping over the horses to stay warm. Around 1900 a gas-producing plant was installed in this building which supplied gas for lighting in the Main House.



Coach House



The Temple

One of the most well-known buildings in Oak Park is The Temple. It was commissioned by Henry Bruen II in 1841 and designed by Architect John B. Keane in the style of a Greek Temple. It was intended as a memorial to Bruen's win over young Daniel O'Connell in the English Parliamentary Elections of 1841. Separately, supporters of Bruen had been collecting money privately to celebrate his win, and at his behest it was used to build St. Anne's Church on the Athy Road, Carlow.

The money ran out before this church was completed and Bruen is reputed to have diverted Temple funds towards its completion. Shortly afterwards Bruen died and although the cut stone for the completion of the Temple was on site, it was never finished.



The Temple

The partially completed Temple was later used as a Mausoleum, and the last two Henry Bruens and their wives are buried there. In 1928 St. Anne's Church was taken down, brick by brick, and re-erected as St. Clare's Church in Graiguecullen, Carlow.

Painestown School & Church

A School and Church existed on the Oak Park Estate going back to the middle of the 1800's. The school provided education for children of workers of all denominations and probably pre-dated any formal schooling system in the country.

The Painestown Church, as it was called, was for the use of the family and their employees. Regular church services were held there and there are many reports of colourful Bruen weddings been held there in the late 1800's. Both buildings have now disappeared, the last one to go was the schoolhouse which was burnt down in the mid-1980's.



Painestown School and Church



Decline of the Bruen Dynasty

Various factors caused a rapid decline in the powers of the Bruens and other Landlords towards the end of the 19th century.

Firstly, the Ballot Act of 1872 introduced the Secret Ballot and for the first time tenants could vote against their landlords without fear of reprisal.

Following on from that the British Government introduced a number of Land Acts which in effect gave the tenants the power to buy out their holdings.

This left many Landlords in their big houses without any real income except that from the estate on which they lived. Many, fearing reprisal from the local militia during the fight for Irish freedom sold out and returned to England. Although over 200 mansions were burned down during this period, Oak Park House was fortunate to escape. The Bruen Family's 175 year occupancy at Oak Park finally came to an end, when the fifth and last Henry Bruen died without a male heir in 1954.

He was estranged from his wife, Gladys McClintock, and daughter Patricia for some years and willed the entire estate to his first cousin, Francis Bruen, to maintain the family name. Francis was the son of Admiral Edward Francis Bruen and had been born and reared in England. A bitter legal battle developed between Francis Bruen and Henry Bruen's daughter Patricia, who had been left a paltry amount of just £300 a year.



Patricia Bruen

To settle this dispute the Oak Park estate was sold in 1957 to an English farming syndicate – Brownes Hill Farms, who already controlled substantial lands in the area. The furniture and contents of the house were disposed of at a clearance auction and the house was left unoccupied. In 1969, the funeral of Gladys McClintock arrived at Oak Park unannounced and she was buried in The Temple beside her long estranged husband Henry.

Brownes Hill Farms farmed the lands for a number of years, but Oak Park House remained unoccupied. During the harvests it was used as a grain store. As a result of poor harvests and local agitation to have the lands divided, the estate was sold to the Irish Land Commission in 1960.



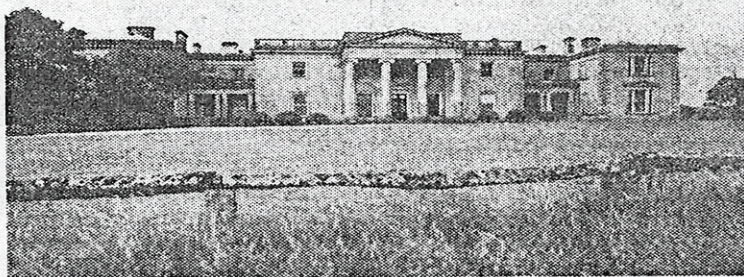
HAMILTON AND (ESTATES),

FOR SALE BY PUBLIC AUCTION

(UNLESS PREVIOUSLY DISPOSED OF)

ON WEDNESDAY, 25th SEPTEMBER, 1957, at 2.30 p.m.
IN OUR SALEROOMS, 44 MOLESWORTH ST., DUBLIN

OAK PARK COUNTY CARLOW



VIEW OF RESIDENCE

ON APPROXIMATELY 1,500 ACRES STATUTE MEASURE
A REALLY BEAUTIFUL GEORGIAN HOME TO BE
SOLD, TOGETHER WITH A LARGE READY-
MADE INCOME

THIS PROPERTY MUST BE SEEN TO BE APPRECIATED
OAKPARK IS UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF THE FINEST AGRICULTURAL, RESIDENTIAL AND SPORTING ESTATES TO COME ON THE MARKET IN RECENT YEARS, HAVING A DELIGHTFUL GEORGIAN RESIDENCE, WITH A CHARM SELDOM EQUALLED.

This unique property is situated two miles from Carlow, 52 miles from Dublin, and approached by a most attractive carriage drive. The Estate encircles the residence, and is composed of around 1,000 acres of prime arable land, 465 acres of very valuable timber, and a 30-acre lake. The entire Estate has been extremely well maintained, no expense having been spared in redecoration and reconstruction, etc.

The Georgian residence is without any doubt one of the most beautiful in Ireland, all rooms having most exquisitely ornamented cornices and ceilings, and at the same time the entire is very easy of up-keep. There is central heating throughout.

A FEATURE OF THE PROPERTY IS THE THREE BOSSI MANTELPieces
TO BE INCLUDED IN THE SALE.

ACCOMMODATION:

Magnificent pillared hall, 5 reception rooms, billiards room, 2 principal bedrooms, each with dressing room en suite; 6 other large, family bedrooms; 1 dressing room, box room, 3 bathrooms and w.c.s; separate servants' wing adjoining.

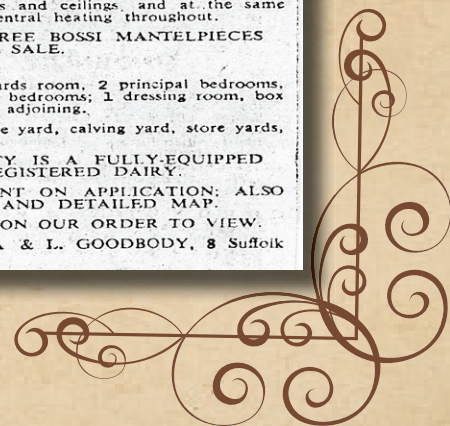
Magnificent Out-offices, including cattle yard, stable yard, calving yard, store yards, all in first-class order.

INCLUDED IN THE SALE OF THE PROPERTY IS A FULLY-EQUIPPED
SAW-MILL. THE PROPERTY IS A REGISTERED DAIRY.

PARTICULARS OF RENT ROLL, FARM ACCOUNT ON APPLICATION; ALSO
LIST OF COTTAGES, OUTGOINGS, ETC., AND DETAILED MAP.

SEEN ONLY BY SPECIAL APPOINTMENT AND ON OUR ORDER TO VIEW.

Solicitors having Carriage of Sale: Messrs. A & L. GOODBODY, 8 Suffolk
Street, Dublin.





Agricultural Research

In the division that followed, An Foras Talúntais, which had just been established as the National Agricultural Institute, was given 344 hectares including Oak Park House. Other parts of the original estate now make up Carlow Golf Club, which had been rented from the Bruen Estate for many years, and the playing fields of Carlow Rugby Club. The remaining 182 hectares was divided into small holdings and allocated to farmers.

Oak Park became the National Crops Research Centre, being ideally located in the heart of Ireland's tillage region and was officially opened by Dr. James Ryan, Minister for Finance, on 29 June 1964. The Agricultural Engineering Department was also located at this site.

An Foras Talúntais arrived at an opportune time, as an extended period of un-occupation of the house would have had serious consequences for its future structural security. The ground floor was used for offices and administration functions, while the upper floor and basement were used as laboratories and storage. A canteen was also located in the basement. The occupancy and on-going maintenance of Oak Park House ensured the upkeep and effective use of the facility from the 1960's.

In 1988, An Foras Talúntais was amalgamated with ACOT, (the Agricultural Advisory and Education Service), to form Teagasc - The Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority.

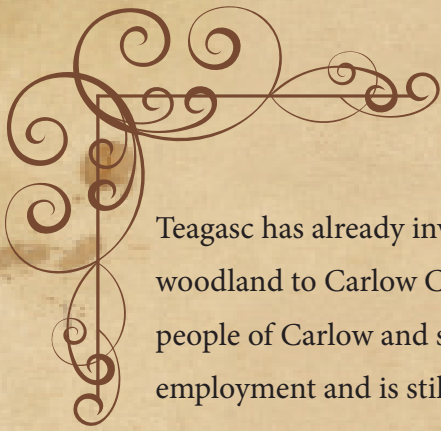
This made Oak Park one of the primary Agricultural Research and Advisory Centres in the country, ensuring the upkeep and effective use of Oak Park House and lands. Because of the changing nature of agricultural research it became apparent that the laboratory facilities in Oak Park House were no longer adequate. A number of new 'state of the art' laboratories were constructed on the campus to cater for this change and Teagasc Head Office moved from Dublin to Oak Park House in 2004.

Oak Park Estate was the location for The National Ploughing Championships in 1938, 1959, 1988, 1989 and 1990 and the National and World Ploughing Championships in 1996, attracting visitors from all over the globe.



*Oak Park was the site for the National Ploughing Championships
in 1938, 1959, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1996.*





Teagasc has already invested over €1m on upgrading Oak Park House. In 2005 it leased 48 hectares of woodland to Carlow County Council for development as a public park which is a major asset for the people of Carlow and surrounding areas. For more than 300 years, Oak Park Estate has provided vital employment and is still a key employer in the region.

By locating the Head Office in Oak Park House, updating the research infrastructure on the campus, and leasing lands for a public park, Teagasc is ensuring that Oak Park House and the surrounding estate lands, will continue to be an integral part of Carlow's future agricultural, commercial and cultural development.



Oak Park House today

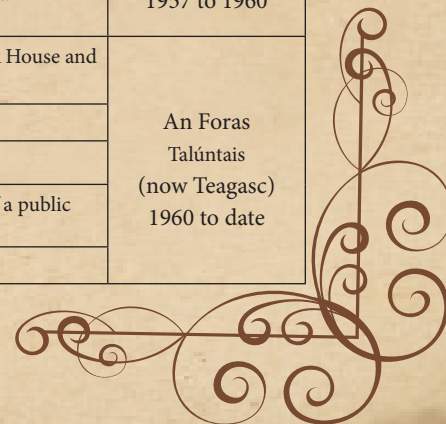




Historical Milestones of Oak Park and Carlow

1607	Flight of the Earls.	Cooke's Early 1600's to 1785
1641	Outbreak of rebellion. Many Protestants were killed in the early months. Families sought refuge in Carlow Castle which was besieged by the rebels.	
1649-50	Cromwell executes vengeance on the Catholics. Some of the Loyalists and Catholics lose their properties in Carlow.	
1659	End of Cromwellian Campaign in Ireland.	
1691	Treaty of Limerick ends Williamite Wars. (Battle of the Boyne & Battle of Aughrim).	
1695-1728	Penal Laws introduced to uphold the establishment of the Church of England in Ireland against Protestant non-conformists and Catholics by imposing various forfeitures, civil penalties and civil disabilities upon these dissenters (laws imposed included Education Act 1695, Banishment Act 1697, Registration Act 1704, Popery Act 1704 – 1709 and Disenfranchising Act 1728).	
1783	End of American War of Independence – first Henry Bruen to own Oak Park was Quartermaster in the British Army in that war.	Bruens 1785 to 1957
1785	Henry Bruen purchases Oak Park – then known as Painestown. He marries Dorothea Henrietta Knox of Rappa Castle, Co. Mayo and has six children.	
1793	Opening of St Patrick's College, Carlow - the first Catholic college in Ireland for higher studies as penal laws are relaxed.	
1795	Henry Bruen I dies and is buried in a vault in St. John's Church in Nurney village, Co. Carlow. Guardians appointed for his children were Francis Knox (Rappa Castle Co. Mayo), The Right Honourable Henry King (Beleek, Co. Mayo) and Robert French (Co. Galway).	
1798	United Irishmen Rebellion. Hundreds of rebels ambushed in Tullow Street and buried in the Croppies' Grave in Graiguecullen.	
1800	Act of Union abolishes the Irish Parliament. By 1800 the Barrow Track was completed between St. Mullin's and Athy, establishing a link to the Grand Canal which runs between Dublin and the Shannon. By 1845, 88,000 tons of goods were being transported on the Barrow Navigation.	
1812	Henry Bruen II (aged twenty-two) is returned as Tory member of Parliament for Co. Carlow and remained MP for Carlow based at Oak Park for the next 40 years with the exception of some brief periods during the turbulence following the granting of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 which reduced restrictions introduced by Penal Laws.	
1822	Henry Bruen II marries Ann Wandesforde, daughter of Thomas Kavanagh of Borris House.	
1822	Henry Bruen II commissioned William Morrison to remodel Oak Park House. The Grand Entrance Triumphant, Lake and The Temple were all constructed in subsequent years throughout his life.	
1828	Henry Bruen III born 16 June 1828.	
1841	General election. To celebrate his victory over Daniel O'Connell junior Henry Bruen II builds St. Anne's Church on the Athy Road in Carlow.	
1845-1852	Great Famine. An estimated one million die and another million emigrate. Although not as severe as in the West of Ireland, the Famine in Carlow brought hunger, cholera, death, an overcrowded workhouse and emigration.	
1846	Carlow was also one of the earliest towns to be connected by train to Dublin. The Great Southern and Western Railway had opened its mainline as far as Carlow.	
1852	Henry Bruen II dies and is buried in the Bruen vault in St. John's Church in Nurney village, Co. Carlow.	
1854	Henry Bruen III marries Mary Margaret Connolly, daughter of Lieu-Col Edward Michael Connolly of Castletown and Cliff.	
1870	Home Rule movement launched.	

1872	Ballot Act introduces secret voting.	
1877	Henry Bruen III undertook a complete refurbishment of Oak Park House to the design of architects McCurdy and Mitchell.	
1880	General election. Defeat of Henry Bruen by Home Rule candidate ending the Bruen's family long reign as MPs for Carlow.	
1886	Henry Bruen IV marries Agnes Mary MacMurrough Kavanagh of Borris House, Co. Carlow.	
1891	Carlow town supplied with electricity generated from water power on the River Barrow at Milford.	
1902	Furnace used for heating Oak Park House caused a fire which destroyed the centre section and east wing of the house.	
1912	Henry Bruen III dies and is buried in the family vault in Nurney Village, Co. Carlow.	
1914-1918	World War I.	
1916	Easter Rising. One of the sixteen leaders executed was Michael O'Hanrahan who was educated in the CBS Academy, Carlow and a founder of the first branch of the Gaelic League in the town.	
1918	General election. Seamus Lennon, Sinn Féin elected unopposed for Carlow and entitled to take his seat in the First Dáil.	
1919-1921	War of Independence.	
1922	Irish Free State established.	
1926	Sugar beet processing plant constructed in Carlow.	
1927	Henry Bruen IV dies and is buried in the Temple on the Oak Park Estate. His son Henry V was born in 1887 and he married Jane Catherine McClintock of Rathvinden in 1913, They had one daughter, Patricia. Henry V served with the 15th Hussars during World War I.	
1928	Carlow town connected to mains electricity supplied from Ardnacrusha power station.	
1929	Opening of St. Clare's Church, Graiguecullen. St. Anne's Church on Athy Road was purchased for a nominal sum from the Bruen family and transported across the bridge to Graiguecullen. Many of the original features of St. Anne's were retained in the new church.	
1939	Mrs. Bruen eloped with a Montenegrin prince leaving Henry alone in Oak Park.	
1954	Henry Bruen V dies and disinherited his wife and daughter in favour of his cousin Francis Bruen.	
1957	Henry's daughter contested the will and a compromise was reached resulting in the sale of the estate and its contents. It was purchased by an English Farming syndicate, Brownhill Estates, who already owned a substantial area of land in Carlow.	Brownhill Estates 1957 to 1960
1960	Land Commission purchased the lands of Brownes Hill Farms following local agitation and Oak Park House and 344 hectares was transferred to An Foras Talúntais to set up an Agriculture Research Centre.	An Foras Talúntais (now Teagasc) 1960 to date
1988	An Foras Talúntais joins ACOT to form Teagasc.	
2004	Teagasc Head Office moves from Dublin to Oak Park House.	
2005	Teagasc lease 48 hectares of woodland at Oak Park to Carlow County Council for the development of a public park.	
2009	New Wing of Oak Park House designed by architects C.J. Falconer & Associates.	



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Scan the QR code to
watch a video of the
history of Oak Park



WATCH