

Emo Court

A Resource Book



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Laois Education Centre
The Office of Public Works
2009

I am very pleased to introduce Emo Court to educational professionals by means of this excellent new book. One of the core tasks of the Office of Public Works is to educate and Emo Court, as well as being a magnificent and fascinating heritage site in its own right, is a microcosm of Irish social history over the past three centuries. I very much hope that you and your pupils enjoy your visit.

Dermot Burke
*Director
Heritage Service
Office of Public Works*

Laois Education Centre, in partnership with the Office of Public Works, is delighted to have coordinated this educational project which has created teaching and learning resources based on Emo Court. It is essential that properties like Emo Court are appreciated as a rich cultural asset particularly by our young people. These resources which span both primary and post primary curricula will serve as an invaluable source of material for both teachers and pupils, and will further serve to inform and promote an appreciation of the culture that lies at our own doorstep.

Jim Enright
*Director
Laois Education Centre*

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Office of Public Works (page 5), 7th Earl of Portarlington (page 8: 1st and 6th Earls, worksheet Viscount Carlow), JWH Carter *The Land War in Queen's County 1879-82* (page 8: 3rd Earl of Portarlington), Father Browne Archive (page 9: Refectory), Olive Sharkey (page 14,15: drawings), Mr. and Mrs. Noel Davis (page 15), National Gallery of Ireland (page 18: James Gandon), Jesuit Archives (page 18: Father Frank Browne S.J.), National Library of Ireland (page 14: Ms. 19722), National Archives of Ireland (page 14: Census 1911 65/6/9 and page 15: Ms. 6188.1)

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Worksheets by: Paddy Bates, Rosemary Day, Bernadette Dunne, Bridie Dunne, Jill Hackett, Carmel Hinchion, Talitha Horan, Mary McCarthy, Dinah Kingsley, Emma Saunders.

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For more information about Emo Court and for more worksheets:

www.emocourt.net

www.laoisedcentre.ie

For general information about heritage sites in Ireland:

www.heritageireland.ie

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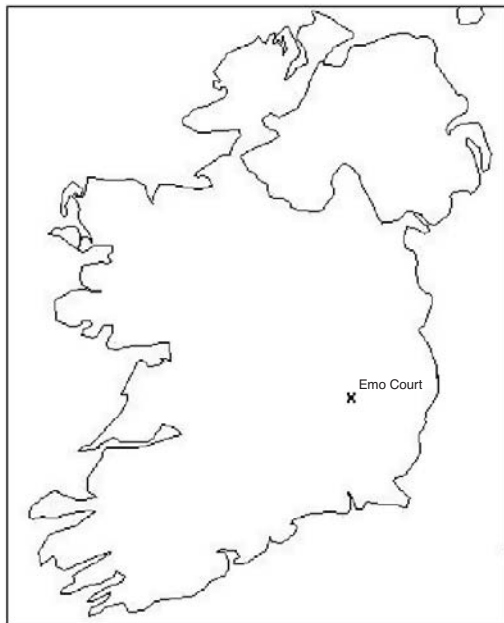
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Essential Information



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Location

The entrance to Emo Court is in Emo village. Emo is 3 km from the M6 Dublin-Cork/Limerick motorway. It is 11 km north of Portlaoise, and 7 km south of Portarlington: both towns have train stations.

Access

The house is open from Easter to mid-September. School parties visit by arrangement. The average length of the visit is one hour. The gardens are open throughout the year free of charge. No dogs are allowed.

Access for disabled people

There is wheelchair access to the grounds and tea rooms. Access to the house is limited.

Booking for school visits

Please book your visit in advance. There should be a ratio of one adult to every ten children. Teachers and accompanying adults are responsible for children's behaviour.

Costs

Groups from schools with their teachers are admitted free of charge to the house.

Tea Rooms

The tea rooms are situated beside the main house in the Dower House, and are open in summer from 10am to 5pm and at weekends in winter.

Toilets

Toilets are situated at the car park and in the tea rooms.

Photography

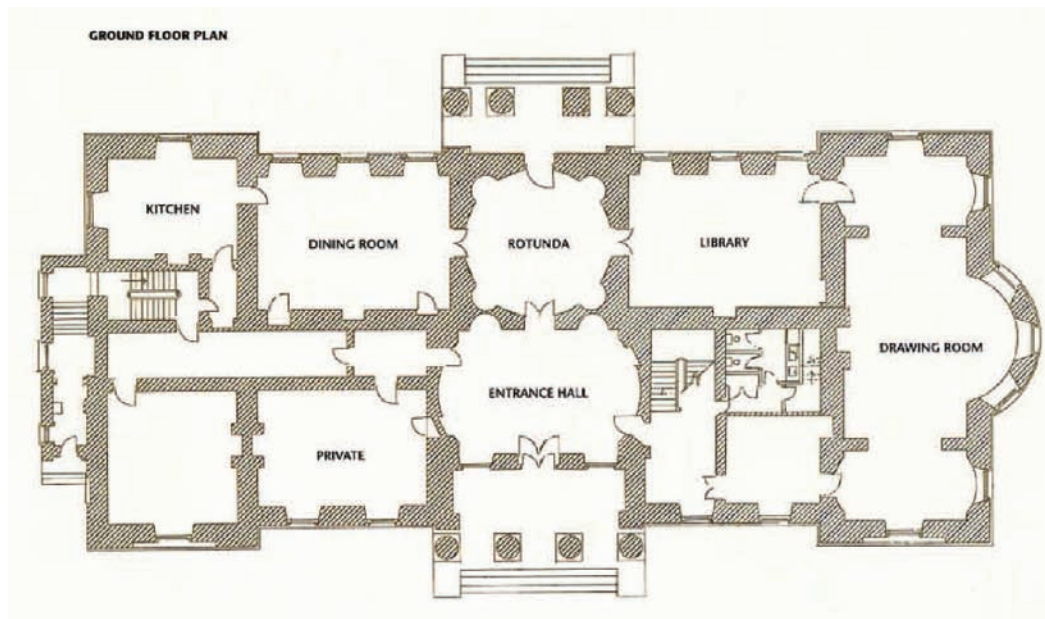
For conservation reasons, no photography or video recording is permitted inside the building.

Coaches

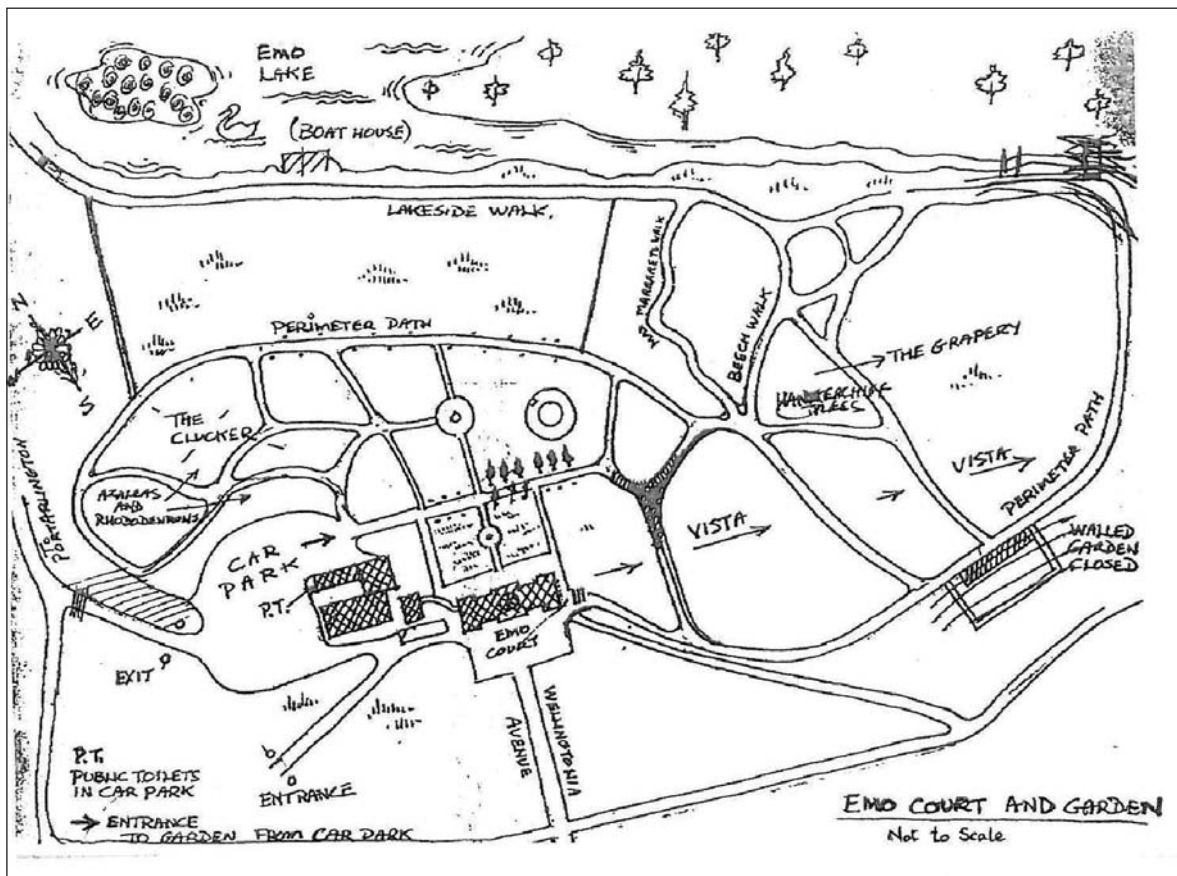
There is parking for coaches in the car park beside the house.

Emo Court

Plan of Ground Floor of House



Map of Gardens



Educational Opportunities at Emo Court

This resource folder contains information, ideas and worksheets to suit teachers at both first and second levels. There are suggestions for work in English, History, Art, Science and Geography.



English

During their educational visit, pupils will have a chance to listen to information and to respond appropriately. This experience will provide a firm basis for work in reading and writing and the development of comprehension. Diaries, letter-writing and poetry are some of the activities that may develop.

Geography

First-hand experience in exploring the local environment is gained at Emo Court. Fieldwork skills, mapping, observation and recording of natural features and wildlife in the woodlands and gardens can be undertaken.

Science

The parkland, lake, woods and gardens provide opportunities for pupils to develop their enquiry skills in practical investigation and data collection at various times of the year – for example, a visit to Emo Court in October can be linked to Tree Day.

Visual Arts

The interior and exterior of Emo Court provide ample opportunities for pupils to consider the work of artists, craftsmen, architects and designers, and to compare and contrast this work with that of the present day.

History

An excellent opportunity for investigating an aspect of local history is provided by Emo Court. It gives an insight into the local “Big House” and the lifestyle of its owners and servants. Much information and assistance can be found on the website.

SPHE

The history of Emo Court will help develop a sense of community and citizenship through an imaginative investigation of the lives of different people living in different times and places.

Drama

Through role-play, pupils can re-enact the lives of people associated with Emo Court in the past, developing ideas about lifestyles in different periods.

Transition Year

Emo Court provides a solid basis for a Transition Year module (see website www.emocourt.net) incorporating the above cross-curricular themes and providing extensive opportunities also for IT work, debate, and education for mutual understanding.



The Story of Emo Court

In the early 18th century, Ephraim Dawson, a wealthy banker, after whom Dawson Street in Dublin is named, purchased lands in Queen's County (Co. Laois). He married Anne Preston, the heiress to the Emo Estate, and lived with her in Dawson Court, close to where Emo Court is located today.

Ephraim's grandson John Dawson, 1st Earl of Portarlington, commissioned the building of Emo Court in 1790, although the house was not finally completed until 1870, eighty years later. Emo Court is one of only a few private houses designed by the architect James Gandon, who came from London to Dublin to construct the new Custom House in 1781.

The 1st Earl died in 1798, James Gandon in 1823; the 2nd Earl was continually short of money but managed to engage Lewis Vulliamy, a fashionable London architect, and A. & J. Williamson, Dublin architects, to finish the house. In the period 1824 to 1836, the dining room and garden front portico were built, but it was not until 1860 that the 3rd Earl of Portarlington commissioned William Caldbeck, a Dublin architect, and Thomas Connolly, his contractor, to complete the rotunda, the drawing room, the library, and the Bachelors' Wing which was connected to the house by a curved corridor.

Emo Court was the largest enclosed estate in Ireland apart from the Phoenix Park in Dublin. It remained the seat of the Earls of Portarlington (whose eldest son is always known as Viscount Carlow) until 1920, when the house and its vast demesne of over 4,500 hectares were sold to the Land Commission.

The house remained empty until 1930 when it was bought by the Society of Jesus as a novitiate. Structural changes were made to the house to enable it to function as an institution rather than a family home: the rotunda and library became the chapel, marble columns and fireplaces were removed and stored, and dormitories were constructed. In 1958 dry rot was discovered, and the well-known architect Michael Scott suggested that the house be demolished to make way for a new building. The Rector Father Donal O'Sullivan ensured that this did not happen, and repairs were made and central heating installed.

In 1969, the Jesuits left Emo, and the house was bought by Major Cholmeley Dering Cholmeley-Harrison. Over the next twenty years, the house underwent a loving and meticulous restoration, using the London architectural firm of Sir Albert Richardson and Partners and local craftsmen.

In 1995, President Mary Robinson officially received Emo Court from Major Cholmeley-Harrison on behalf of the Irish nation. The house and gardens are now in the care of the Office of Public Works.



Entrance Facade

Viscount Carlow recalls his childhood visits to Emo in the early years of the 20th century:

"Emo was my idea of heaven. It was one of two homes, and I preferred it to Chesham Place [London]. Wherever I went or whatever I did, my thoughts eventually drifted back to Emo: the wide expanse of soft green mossy turf which seemed to grow so appropriately in front of a Georgian house, the avenue of Wellingtonia pines that stretched from the front door to what appeared to me to be the horizon, the woods and the lake, the acres of wild flowers which grew under the tall beech trees, and the squeaky iron gate dividing the lawn from the drive. I knew it all and loved it."



Garden Facade

The Earls of Portarlington

The 1st Earl of Portarlington



John Dawson (1744-1798) commissioned James Gandon to design Emo Court in 1790. His grandfather Ephraim Dawson had married Anne Preston, the heiress to the Emo estate, and fixed his residence in the nearby Dawson Court. John Dawson was created Earl in 1785, but died of pneumonia in 1798 in Co. Mayo, having been sent there to guard French prisoners. He was buried in Coolbanagher.

The 2nd Earl of Portarlington

Also named John Dawson, the 2nd Earl (1781-1845) chose the army as his career. Having suffered disgrace at the Battle of Waterloo following his late arrival, he resigned and retreated into a life of dissipation. However, he engaged Lewis Vulliamy, a fashionable London architect, to work on completing the house. He died unmarried and in extensive debt.

The 3rd Earl of Portarlington

The 3rd Earl, Henry Dawson-Damer (1822-1889), was the nephew of the 2nd Earl, and assumed the extra name of Damer in order to inherit valuable estates. Dawson-Damer became the family name. He married Alexandrina, the daughter of the Marquess of Londonderry, and they made Emo Court their principal residence. William Caldbeck, a Dublin architect, was



commissioned to finish the house. The 3rd Earl was a popular and benevolent landlord, generous to his tenants during the Famine years. He became a representative peer and a Knight of St Patrick. He was buried in Coolbanagher.

The 4th Earl of Portarlington

As the 3rd Earl had no children, he was succeeded by his cousin Lionel Seymour (1832-1892) – known as “Hippy” – who had been MP for the borough of Portarlington for many years. He made little impact at Emo Court, as he died only three years after inheriting, leaving his son to take over the running of the estate and house.

The 5th Earl of Portarlington

The 5th Earl Lionel George (1858-1900) and his family visited Emo often during his eight years as Earl. His interests were many and varied – shooting, horse racing, cycling, conjuring, photography – and he was important in Masonic circles. He died aged 42 and was buried in Coolbanagher; he was succeeded by his son, Lionel Arthur, aged 17.

The 6th Earl of Portarlington

The 6th Earl Lionel Arthur (1883-1959) married a wealthy Scottish heiress, Winnifreda Yuill, in 1907, but there were constant financial difficulties at Emo and World War I drained the estate of men. The 6th Earl and his wife preferred the social life of London and the continent, and so in 1920 it was decided to sell Emo Court.



Viscount Carlow (1907-1944), son of the 6th Earl, established the Corvinus Press in England, and published very fine limited editions of T. E. Lawrence, James Joyce and other contemporary writers. During World War II, he became a squadron leader in the RAF but was killed in 1944 in a plane crash.

The 7th Earl of Portarlington

The 7th Earl George Lionel Yuill Dawson-Damer (1938-) is the grandson of the 6th Earl. He has three children and resides in Scotland and Australia. The present Viscount Carlow also lives in Australia.

The Jesuits

Following the departure of the Dawson-Damer family to England and the auction of the house contents, the house had lain empty since 1920. Much of the estate was owned by the Land Commission, and the house and part of the gardens were put up for sale. The house itself had fallen into some disrepair and the gardens had become completely overgrown.

In 1929, the Society of Jesus in Ireland decided to look for a new novitiate house which would be suitably remote and peaceful. Emo Court, along with 280 acres (150 hectares), was purchased in February 1930 for £2,000. Emo Court became known as St. Mary's, Emo. There were 52 novices that year.



Saloon as Refectory

Structural changes had to be made to turn a family home into an institution. Central heating and washing facilities had to be installed. Bedrooms had to be turned into dormitories. The rotunda and (present) library were converted into a chapel by removing columns, doors, a mantelpiece and walls. The saloon (former library) at the east end of the house became the community refectory. Marble columns, doors, mantelpieces, and statues were removed and stored. Inadequate water provision to the house was improved by taking a supply via the lake from the Toberkine well, and 3,000 gallons a day were pumped to the house.

The distinguished Jesuit photographer, Fr Frank Browne, lived at Emo from 1930-1957, and the Irish author Benedict Kiely was a novice there.

In 1958, dry rot was discovered and the roof needed renewal. Extensive repairs and rebuilding were carried out at the instigation of the Rector, Fr Donal O'Sullivan. A large attic storey was added and oil-fired central heating was installed.

In the 1960s, it became apparent that St. Mary's was too isolated for the more modern ideas about training novices for work with the Society. The number of novices had dwindled to 15. In September 1969, the Jesuits left Emo for Manresa House in Dublin. Over 500 young men had begun their lives as Jesuits at Emo.

Major Cholmeley Dering Cholmeley-Harrison

Major Cholmeley-Harrison told the story that he saw a sale advertisement for Emo Court in a newspaper on his way to the Irish Derby at The Curragh in 1969. He diverted to see the house, fell in love with the place and was able to acquire the property from the Jesuits for around £40,000. He then embarked on a long and enlightened restoration, commissioning the London architectural firm of Sir Albert Richardson & Partners, but using mostly local craftsmen.

The Jesuits had extensively altered Emo Court to suit their purposes. However, over the following years, the house was restored to magnificence, and the gardens were tamed through the planting of specimen trees and shrubs such as davidia, azaleas and camellias. Major Cholmeley-Harrison later commented: "It was lovely work. I enjoyed it enormously."



Major Cholmeley-Harrison and President Mary Robinson at the handing over of Emo Court in 1995

In 1995, Emo Court came into State ownership. Major Cholmeley-Harrison explained why he made the decision to hand over the house and estate: "I have no son and my daughters and their children have other hopes and homes. They would never come here so I thought it would be better to give it while I am still compos mentis. The place takes quite a lot of running, one way or the other. The future of the house is safer this way. It can't be sold or turned into a country club."

Major Cholmeley-Harrison continued to live at Emo Court until his death in July 2008. His ashes were placed in Coolbanagher Church in one of the urns that he had donated, and a cherry tree was planted at Emo Court in his memory.

The Front Entrance Exterior



The finest vista of the house is provided by approaching it along the Wellingtonia avenue planted by the 3rd Earl of Portarlington in the 1850s. The entrance front is dominated by a pediment supported by four Ionic pillars, and the seven bay centre is enclosed by end pavilions which are decorated with Coade stone panels. The panel on the left is pastoral; the one on the right is dated 1794 and represents the Arts. Architectural *putti* (cherubs) can be seen examining James Gandon's design for Emo Court. The coat of arms of the Dawson-Damers – the family of the Earls of Portarlington – is over the portico, and is dated 1796. The heraldic tigers on each side of the steps are made of re-constituted stone, and each supports the Dawson quarter of the coat of arms; one is signed by the Cork sculptor Robert Barter and dated 1854.



The Entrance Hall

The Entrance Hall looks very different today compared to its appearance until the 1960s. The walls were hung with embossed leather for warmth, and there was “a vast collection of spears, swords, pikes and other mediaeval weapons... In the left hand corner there was a large chest for rugs, a grandfather clock, and an evil-looking Napoleonic boot” (Viscount Carlow's Diary).



The 19th century brass lantern in the centre is one of the few original furnishings in the house. The original plasterwork on the ceiling depicts oak leaves, reflecting the number of oak trees on the estate. There are also oak leaves in the marble surround of the central internal doorway. The coves at each side were painted in *trompe l'oeil* by Geoffrey Ghin to Gandon's unexecuted stuccowork design during the restoration of the house.



The four doors angled on each corner provide a sense of balance but two of them are false and lead nowhere. The two urns in the niches were commissioned by Major Cholmeley-Harrison, and match those in Coolbanagher church. The central Victorian conversation piece was bought at auction by Major Cholmeley-Harrison's mother-in-law for £1.

The Rotunda



The Rotunda, or marble saloon, with double height dome and magnificent coffered ceiling, was built around 1860 by William Caldbeck. The marble pilasters with gilded capitals came from Siena, and originally the Rotunda was opulently furnished with statuary in all the niches. The richly inlaid parquet floor now includes the Cholmeley-Harrison coat of arms, and the Portarlinton coat of arms with its mother-of-pearl heraldic coronet forms the top of the central table. Part of the floor, the marble pilasters and the double doors were removed during the conversion of this room and the adjoining library into a chapel for the Jesuits, and one wall of the rotunda was demolished so that the sanctuary was formed. When the house was being restored, marble from Siena was sourced anew and the mahogany doors which had become badly warped were straightened and returned to their original positions.

Viscount Carlow remembers this room as less peaceful in the early years of the 20th century: it was unfurnished, except for *“a marble statue of Eve eating the proverbial apple and a few brown alabaster vases. The only other ornament was a massive compressed air gramophone, surmounted by a huge brass horn which frequently blared forth music of every description, especially when Papa was in the house.”* In the nearby passage to the boudoir, there was *“an immense electric organ, which put up a rival entertainment to the gramophone in the dome.”*

The marble saloon was used when balls were held in house, linking with the dining room and present library and drawing room to form an elegant setting.

Festivities at Emo Park

Visit of H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught

“Emo Park, the princely seat of the Earl of Portarlinton, was the scene of brilliant festivities when on Thursday night his lordship gave a grand ball in honour of the visit of his Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught, to which a distinguished company was invited.

Nothing could exceed the splendour of the arrangements made in honour of the visit of his Royal Highness. Both inside the house and outside, the decorations were on a lavish scale. The several approaches to the mansion were lit by a series of lamps, extending along the Wellingtonia column, to the distance of fully a mile and a half; and suspended from the posts on which these lights were fixed were countless small variegated lamps which, when lit up at night, had an indescribably pretty effect. Festoons of lamps of the same design spanned the external circuit of the house and the adjacent trees.

The decorations of the ball, the supper and the dining rooms were executed under the superintendence of Mr. Bailey, his lordship's private secretary. The decorations of the ball room were particularly effective, while all were models of the most polished elegance and taste. Groups of statuary, interspersed with flowers, filled the grand saloon, the statue of Eve and the apple being especially prominent by its exquisitely shaped lines. The grand staircase ascending to the ball room was magnificently lit and ornamented with stands of flowers of native and exotic growths, supplied from the conservatory by Mr. Ennis, his lordship's gardener. Innumerable lights peeped from between each stand, and mingling with the rich profusion of the surroundings, recalled to mind the vision of a fairy scene ... But we find ourselves at a loss to portray the sumptuous fittings of the ball room. What with its massive mosaic floor, its ceiling to represent the sky, its costly paintings and costlier statuary, all the very cream of the fine arts, its gilt cornices and sides lined with tarlatan and gold, with flowers giving forth the most delicious fragrance, and the whole lit up by a dozen of crescent shaped candelabra – a more brilliant spectacle could not be witnessed.”

(Leinster Express, December 9th, 1876)

The Dining Room



During Jesuit ownership, the dining room was used as a conference room. It has now been restored to its original function and is an elegant room, with tall windows overlooking the park. The ceiling is especially beautiful, with 1830s plasterwork by Vulliamy echoing the oak leaf motif seen in the entrance hall. The table and chairs were made in Dublin by James Hicks, the last of the great Irish cabinet-makers, who made furniture in the 1920s for Leinster House and Áras an Uachtaráin, and also the famous 'Titania's Palace' dolls' house.

The portraits on the walls are of members of Major Cholmeley-Harrison's family. The picture over the side table of Edward Cholmeley Dering as a child (in a dress) painted by Sir Martin Arthur Shee in 1837 is particularly charming. The plate bucket under the long table on the end wall was used to carry plates from the kitchen, and probably would have been one of a pair carried on a yoke by the footman. Various ornaments in the room (such as the cigarette holder made from a deer's foot) were presented to Major Cholmeley-Harrison or to his father during their army careers. The mahogany cellarette near the windows was used as a small movable wine cooler, and bottles were often made especially to fit the cellarette.



Cellarette

Some Key Dining Moments at Emo Court

- | | | | |
|------------------|--|------------------|--|
| 1817 Apr | The 2nd Earl gave a dinner party for eight guests. | | of tea and cake were served to 1,200 children. |
| 1820 July | Officers of the 18th Hussars dined at Emo Court. | 1899 July | Picnic at Emo Park: the weather was fine and sunny, and the entertainments included singing, recitations and dancing. |
| 1840 Feb | The dining room was finished – the 2nd Earl dined there for the first time. | | |
| 1848 Aug | A sumptuous meal was given to celebrate the first visit of Lady Portarlington to Emo Park. The 200 guests (gentlemen and farmers) enjoyed many delicacies, including pies, jellies, blancmanges, pineapples, and lobsters brought fresh from Kingstown that morning. | 1907 Mar | Homecoming party to celebrate the return of Lord and Lady Portarlington from their honeymoon. The labourers, tenants and people of Portarlington were treated to food and refreshments, and were fed in batches, owing to the large turn-out. The celebrations ended with a fireworks display, while an immense bonfire and electric torches lit up the grounds. |
| 1861 July | The Prince of Wales dined at Emo Court; The house was lit by gas for the first time | | |
| 1863 Feb | Lord Portarlington entertained his tenants, household and labourers to a lavish dinner in honour of the marriage of the Prince of Wales. | 1911 Sept | Open-air fete and tea party for 400 guests at Emo Park. The tea party was catered by George Mathews of Portarlington and a helter-skelter provided great entertainment. |
| 1876 Dec | A ball was given at Emo Court to mark the visit of the Duke of Connaught. The supper and dining rooms were decorated with stands of native and exotic flowers, while crescent-shaped candelabra provided illumination. | 1912 Jan | A ball was given for the tenants and household of Emo Park and the people of the surrounding neighbourhood. 300 guests were served food and refreshments. |
| 1892 Jan | A servants' ball was given at Emo Court. Supper was served in the servants' hall, which was elaborately fitted up for the occasion, and refreshments were served in the billiard room. | 1914 Jan | The local school children were entertained to a Christmas tea with presents for each child and abundant amounts of cake, sweetmeats and bon-bons. |
| 1897 Aug | Jubilee school fete at Emo Park: liberal amounts | | |

The Library



The library was originally built as a drawing room, and was completed during the lifetime of the 3rd Earl. It was the last room in the house to be completed. Both floor and ceiling are original. The magnificent rococo fireplace of Carrara marble was removed during the conversion of the room into a chapel by the Jesuits, and was stored in the basement; it was reinstated during the restoration of the house. The oak panelling on the walls has been removed, and the present decoration is that of the mid-20th century in a grand country house.

This is the room in which Major Cholmeley-Harrison's taste is most in evidence. The large bookcase was left to him in a will after he had admired it in a friend's house. The pieces of black Wedgewood – Bacchus, Mercury and Neptune – along the top shelf were collected by him. The butler's corner cupboard was bought by him at an auction at Stowe, his old school. The desk at the window came from Glamis Castle through his mother's family. The correspondence box belonged to his great-grandmother; the portraits on the walls are of his family and the photographs on the tables are of his three daughters.



The Drawing Room or Saloon

The drawing room was built originally as a library, and extends from the front to the back of the house on the east side. Viscount Carlow writes: *"The library ...was full of every kind of book from the Army List of 1893 to Sir Walter Scott's novels and the inventions of Archimedes, and it was not until*

we had a general rearrangement that we realised what a lot of useless books we possessed." Having the proportions of a long gallery, the drawing room/library also at times doubled as a ballroom. Its generous bow window gives onto the garden, and the interior decoration reflects the greenness outside. It is divided into three parts by green marble Ionic columns topped with gilt capitals. These were removed by the Jesuits to facilitate the use of the room as a refectory.



The gilt wood valances and the central brass lantern are original to the house. The paintings are from Major Cholmeley-Harrison's collection, and artists include Trevesani, Bisshop, N. Poussin, and Schaepe. A portrait of the Major by John Devlin in 2006 hangs near the bow window. The portraits of Major Cholmeley-Harrison's uncle and aunt at the library end are by Peter Alexander Hay, and a mid-1700s Irish yew settee stands between them. The grand piano reflects the Major's interest in music, and concerts are often held in this room.

The Morning Room

The Morning Room was originally the billiard room, and was divided by Major Cholmeley-Harrison into a study and cloakroom. This was also the schoolroom (called the Red Room at the time) for Viscount Carlow and his governess Miss Howe, in which, he recalls, he shed many a tear. The chimney piece is original, and furniture dates from the 18th century.

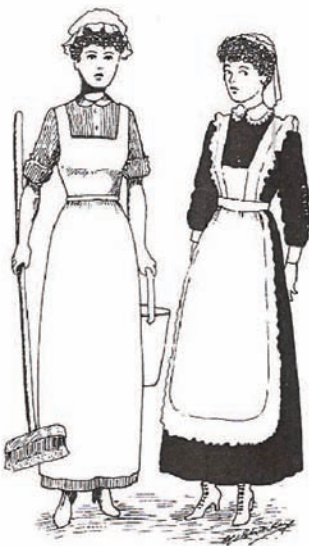
Typically of Gandon, the cantilevered Portland stone stairwell between the Morning Room and the hall is discreetly placed away from the main reception area with restrained, almost austere, design. Woodstown House, the former residence of Major Cholmeley-Harrison, is seen in the background of the Susan Crawford equine portrait. The tallboy chest with thistle decoration and the long-case clock came from Glamis Castle in Scotland.

Servants at Emo Court

When the Dawson-Damer family lived at Emo, they employed a small army of household servants and outdoor staff to maintain the house and grounds.

The running of the household was entrusted to the butler and housekeeper, who led a team of footmen, housemaids, and kitchen- and scullery-maids. Outdoors, the land agent, head gamekeeper and head gardener ensured that the estate ran smoothly and that the gardens and pleasure grounds always looked their best.

The following extracts give an insight into servant life on the estate. The annual servants' ball was, no doubt, greatly looked forward to by the servants at Emo.



When the 1911 census was taken, only a skeleton household staff was based at Emo Court, as the family were away from home. Viscount Carlow, aged 3, was the only family member in residence, accompanied by his nurse and nursemaid.

The Servants' Ball of 1892

"On Friday evening, his lordship and her ladyship gave a grand ball to their household...On entering the long hall a signal of 'welcome' greeted those who came to brighten the proceedings of the evening...The front hall and dining-room, with their finely polished oak floors, were converted into a spacious ballroom, and the saloon, with its lofty ceiling and arched entrances, formed a comfortable and favourable position for the band of the Scots Greys, which played a lengthy programme...Refreshments were had in his lordship's billiard room, while supper was served in the most *recherché* style in the servants' hall..."

(Leinster Express, January 16th, 1892)

Servants' Wages Book (1914)

Edith Adams	housekeeper	£65 per year
Florence Page	housemaid	£32 per year
E. Bingham	under housemaid	£32 per year

(National Library of Ireland Ms. 19722)

Viscount Carlow Recalls Edith Adams

Viscount Carlow spent much of his early childhood at Emo Court in the early 20th century. In his diary he recalls the kindness of the housekeeper, Edith Adams, towards him:

"Mrs. Adams the housekeeper made me a present of a hand-painted lamp shade executed by herself. It portrayed a cluster of coloured apples, of brilliant and totally unnatural hue, but to me they were a work of art, and I valued the gift above all my other possessions."

1911 Census

(Outdoor staff are not included)

National Archives of Ireland 65/6/9

Name	Rank or Occupation	Age	Religion	Where Born	Marital Status
George L. Seymour Dawson-Damer	Viscount Carlow	3	Ch of England	London	
Annie L. White	Nursemaid	17	Ch of England	Buckinghamshire	single
Annie Turrell	Nurse	40	Ch of England	Essex	single
Edith Adams	Housekeeper	40	Ch of England	England	single
Margaret Wilson	Head Housemaid	38	Ch of Ireland	Co. Wicklow	single
Sadie Williams	2nd Housemaid	20	Ch of Ireland	Co. Wickow	single
William Carpenter	1st Footman	32	Ch of England	London	single
Annie McKeown	3rd Housemaid	18	Ch of Ireland	Co. Tipperary	single
Brigit Fitzpatrick	Scullerymaid	18	Roman Catholic	Emo, Queen's Co.	single

Outdoor Staff and Tenants



Demesne Workers

Estate workers at Emo included gamekeepers, gardeners, grooms and farm labourers. The head gamekeeper and gardener were usually brought over from England, where highly skilled staff were more readily available.

The gamekeeper was one of the most important members of the outdoor staff. His duties included rearing game-birds for shoots, breeding and killing rabbits, and protecting animals from poachers.



Huge numbers of animals were reared on the estate. At one shoot in 1897, for example, 3414 birds and rabbits were shot in just four days, while in the early 1920s, 8-10,000 rabbits were bred and killed each year. During the shooting season, local boys and labourers were employed to beat the bushes with sticks to draw the birds into the open. Deer were also kept at Emo, and the laborious task of counting them also fell to the gamekeeper and his men.

The Earls of Portarlington and their Tenants

The Earls of Portarlington were generally considered good landlords. The 3rd Earl, in particular, took a great interest in the welfare of his tenants. In 1847, for example, at the height of the Great Famine, he donated £94 to the Portarlington soup kitchen when the next highest donation was £20. He was extremely popular amongst his tenantry and was widely regarded as a kind and benevolent landlord.

Mr. Dempster

John Dempster was the head gamekeeper at Emo in the late 19th and early 20th century. Originally from Scotland, he lived in the gamekeeper's cottage on the estate with his wife and ten children, two of whom died young. His two eldest sons worked alongside their father as under-gamekeepers for a time. Two of the Dempster boys were to lose their lives in the Great War; their names are among those listed on the War Memorial plaque in Coolbanagher Church.



In his diary, Viscount Carlow describes the Dempster family: *"The most familiar figures of all were the Dempsters, who looked after the farm just beyond the garden and lived in a small house with wall flowers growing round the front... Mr. Dempster, the gamekeeper, was a man of weighty appearance with a vast expanse of front view well in keeping with his position."*

Rental Agreement with a Tenant (1856)

"30th September 1856, Catherine Delaney of Cappokeel agreed to pay the Earl of Portarlington five shillings per year for her house and to keep said thatched...and to keep no lodgers & should she do so to pay the sum of one pound a year for said..." *(National Archives: Ms. 6188.1)*

The 3rd Earl of Portarlington on his Tenantry

"When I go about the estate, each farm reminds me of some old friend, some tenant...to whom the home is endeared the same as my home is to me. I like to gaze upon the estate, and see my tenants and their families secure and comfortable in their dwellings." *(Leinster Express, May 1883)*

The Garden



The house was originally approached through the magnificent mile-long Wellingtonia avenue which is said to be the longest of its kind. In 1906, mention of this avenue was made in *The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* by Henry John Elwes and Augustine Henry: “a fine avenue, although the trees (average 70 feet high and 10 feet in girth) are growing on poor shallow limestone soil”. A formal garden with statuary, parkland, woods, yew walks, lime tree avenues and the ten hectare lake were all part of the original layout of the estate. Grassy walks and paths allow exploration of the grounds: the Beech Walk and Mad Margaret’s Walk lead to the lake (Margaret is rumoured to have been an unfortunate housemaid who hanged herself from a tree). Swans, ducks, moorhens and the occasional heron inhabit the lake, which is surrounded by mature trees. Wildlife abounds in the demesne. The deer have always been numerous enough to be mentioned in the Earls’ wills. Red squirrels far outnumber grey squirrels, and several types of bat are resident at Emo Court.

Behind the house is a formal garden with yew walks. The yew trees that line the gravel paths and lawns originated in Florence Court in Co. Fermanagh, and were planted in Victorian times. Beside the small pool is a statue of Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture and grain. The statues in the gardens are mostly original to the demesne, although the statue of Polyhymnia which is centrally placed behind the house was bought by Major Cholmeley-Harrison. Polyhymnia is flanked by four statues representing the Four Seasons, and they are situated so that they can easily be seen from the windows of the house. These statues date from the time of the Dawson-Damer family, and when the Jesuits were in residence, they were often used as an audience in rehearsals for sermons and elocution lessons.

The 3rd Earl of Portarlington and his head gardener Mr. Ennis won many prizes at national and local horticultural shows. Their greatest triumph came in the roses section, and many first prizes were won by their exotic fruits – pineapples, figs, apricots and grapes. The walled garden and hothouses which produced fruit, vegetables and flowers for the house are now sadly in disrepair.



The gardens were not maintained after the house was sold in 1920, although efforts to tame the wilderness were made by the Jesuits. Major Cholmeley-Harrison carried out extensive planting and restoration from 1969 onwards. He created an arboretum in the Grapery, a grassy sweep where once hops were grown. The Golden Gates – the focal point of this vista – are signed by Richard Turner who had designed the conservatories in the National Botanic Gardens in Dublin, at Kew in London, and at Ballyfin House Co. Laois. Trees that are planted here have thrived e.g. the handkerchief tree

Davidia involucrata, the tulip tree *Liriodendron*, the silver fir *Abies delavayi forrestii*, and the beautiful Eucryphia. An enormous walnut tree stands at the centre, and a statue of Bacchus, the Roman god of wine, is concealed in a secluded grove. In autumn, the colours of red, gold, orange and yellow predominate and in spring, drifts of bluebells, primroses and daffodils add to the charm. Nearer to the lake, camellias, pieris, rhododendrons and azaleas have been planted under trees to provide a wonderful spring display.

At the side of the house is a small woodland garden known as the Clucker, where you will find large specimen coniferous trees such as *Cedrus deodara* and *Pinus radiata*. The *Cupressus marcoparpa* or Monterey Cypress has an impressive girth of 30 metres.



There is also a 450-year-old Champion oak tree, and many more azaleas, rhododendrons and Japanese maples have been planted. Almost hidden in the laurel undergrowth, there is a lovely statue of a huntsman and his dog.

The name 'Clucker' may have come from the Irish word *Clochar*, meaning a convent, but there is also a story that this part of the garden was where the maids in the house were allowed to come to gossip and relax – hens clucking!



Very near the car park, there is a small octagonal building which was used as the game store. Following the many shoots held at Emo Court in the late 19th century, deer, pheasants, and other game were hung here on the hooks which still remain in the ceiling. Small octagonal garden buildings were popular in the 18th century, following the classical style by imitating the Tower of the Winds in Athens.

"I came down here to plant some fruit trees I sent from England, which will make a provision for my walks for some years. A very smart frost has however taken place, which is very unlucky, having a great many trees to see planted before I leave this place. The river is full within two inches, and I expect to see the cascade play in a day or two."

(Lord Carlow to Lady Carlow December 1783. *Gleanings from an Old Portfolio*)

"Tall trees fell, laurustinus and arbutus entirely destroyed – among the latter, our beautiful one near the old hothouse. This loss vexes me more than any."

(Lady Carlow to her sister in April 1784 following a storm at Dawson Court. *Gleanings from an Old Portfolio*)

"The trees are well fenced in and in a thriving state, but the soil is unfavourable, being so extremely shallow ... Full grown timber, and some exceeding fine walnut trees are in the vicinity of the lake, and gravel walks in a serpentine form, are cut through the lawn and planted with clumps of evergreens. But the soil of this beautiful demesne is very barren, I suppose the worst in the county.The gardens are very fine, and with the pleasure grounds are taken good care of"

(Sir Charles Coote *Statistical Survey of the Queen's County* 1801)

"The sun shone, the birds sang and the trees were green; the white Georgian house, with its columns and wide stone steps, stood in the midst of it, elegant, graceful, and with an air of authority."

(Viscount Carlow's Diary)

"Classical statues were judiciously placed against pine trees in peaty land, rich in rhododendrons and wild, heavily scented, yellow azaleas."

(John O'Meara *The Singing Masters*)

"Sloping lawns, bleeding newly dug flowerbeds, walks lined with stiff clipped yew trees, white goal posts on playing fields, and, cornering around the woods, the glint of a lake.... the distant glitter of sword-like water ... a squirrel, quick as a snake, red as a ripe horse chestnut."

(Benedict Kiely *There was an Ancient House*)

James Gandon, Architect



James Gandon was born in London in 1742 of Huguenot descent. He attended Shipley's Drawing Academy, and in 1758 was apprenticed to William Chambers, the architect of the Casino at Marino in Dublin.

Gandon's first real connection with Ireland was in 1769, when he won second prize in a competition to design the Royal Exchange in Dublin, now the City Hall. Thus he came to the notice of Sir John Beresford, First Commissioner of the

Revenue and a man of widespread political influence and friend of the 1st Earl of Portarlington, then still Lord Carlow.

Lord Beresford invited Gandon to design a new Custom House in Dublin and in 1781 he moved to Ireland, having declined an invitation from Catherine the Great to settle in St. Petersburg and design public buildings there. He was commissioned also to make extensions to the Parliament House, now the Bank of Ireland in College Green, and to design the new Four Courts and the King's Inns, all in the period 1780 to 1800.

In 1781, Gandon spent Christmas at Dawson Court with his friends Lord and Lady Carlow. He was invited to design a church nearby at Coolbanagher, as the previous thatched-roof church had burned down. Work began in 1782, and the church was consecrated in 1785.

Gandon was then commissioned to design a country mansion for Lord Carlow. Building began at Emo Court around 1790 but much of the house as it stands today is not entirely by him. Work slowed after the death of the 1st Earl of Portarlington in 1798, and it seems likely that only the saloon, entrance hall and the main lines of the south front follow Gandon's plans.

In 1805, James Gandon retired from professional life to live in Lucan, Co. Dublin. He died in 1823 and was buried in Drumcondra in Dublin.

Father Frank Browne S.J., Photographer

Father Frank Browne was born in Cork in 1880. He attended school in Belvedere College and Castleknock College in Dublin. In 1897 he entered the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), and in the following years studied in Dublin and Italy. Photography was always a major interest from his early years, and his camera accompanied him on all his travels.

In April 1912, he was given (by his uncle the Bishop of Cloyne) the present of a ticket for the first two legs of the maiden voyage of the Titanic from Southampton to Cherbourg to Cobh. An American on board offered to pay his fare for the full journey to New York. Permission was brusquely refused by Frank's Jesuit Superior in a telegram: "Get off that ship – Provincial." Frank's photographs of the ill-fated ship's only voyage were printed in newspapers around the world.

In 1916, Frank Browne volunteered for service as a chaplain to the Irish Guards; he served on the Western Front during World War I and rose to the rank of Major. He was at the battle of the Somme and at Paschendaele and Ypres, was wounded five times and awarded the Military Cross and Bar and the Belgian Croix de Guerre for his bravery.

Following the war, he spent several years in Australia due to ill-health. On returning to Ireland, he was based at Emo Court (the Jesuit novitiate St. Mary's) from 1930 to 1957. He took over 5,000 photos in Co. Laois; it is estimated that he took over 42,000 photos of Ireland and abroad in his lifetime.

Father Browne died in 1960 and is buried in Glasnevin cemetery in Dublin.



Church of St John the Evangelist, Coolbanagher



In December 1781, James Gandon the architect was invited to spend Christmas with Lord Carlow and his family at Dawson Court. Lord Carlow wished to start improvements on his estate by constructing a new parish church for Coolbanagher, the previous church having burned down in 1779. Lady Carlow wrote in her diary on New Year's Eve 1781: *"Some of our party are broken up already, Mr. Dawson [the rector] and Mr. Gandon being gone. I cannot say I regret them very much."* Perhaps there had been too much discussion about the new church.

Work began in the spring of 1782 and continued until the end of 1783, when Lord Carlow wrote to his wife in London: *"The church has been neglected but now gets on apace, and I believe I shall have the whole body of it fit for roofing before the winter sets in. I shall not, however, put on the roof till spring."*

Gandon himself did not visit the site very often, being fully occupied with the construction of public buildings in Dublin. Lord Carlow, a man deeply interested in architecture and the arts, was concerned that the church should reflect the classical good taste of the time, and may have had some influence on the final design. It is generally agreed that the spire may not be as originally designed by Gandon.

In March 1785, Lady Carlow wrote to her sister in London: *"We are going to have great doings here next week. The new church is to be consecrated on Tuesday; the Bishop and all the clergy in the neighbourhood are to attend, besides all the country, I suppose, and Lord Carlow will ask them all to dinner both on that day and the next, as there are races within three miles of us. I own I am sorry to begin all this sort of work so soon, but there is no help for it."*

In 1788, a mausoleum designed by Gandon was built beside the church. Lord Carlow (by then the Earl of Portarlington) was buried there in 1798. The 3rd and 5th Earls were also interred there.

In 1868, some changes to the barrel-vaulted ceiling were made. In 1963, the steeple and roof were repaired, and in 1972 a careful programme of total restoration began. Now, apart from the roof, the church is very close to Gandon's original design. In the entrance porch, there is a copy of an 18th century view of the church attributed to James Malton. James Gandon is seen discussing the church with Lord Carlow and Mr. Dawson, the rector.

In 1981, urns similar to those in the original design were placed in the niches by Major Cholmeley-Harrison, one of which would be the repository for his own ashes. The Francetti brothers from Wimbledon in London made the ten urns, two of which may be seen in Emo Court in the hall.



At the back of the church, there is an ancient font rescued in 1927 from Emo Park by the Rev Dudley Fletcher, the rector of Coolbanagher. This may date from the 12th century.

In Their Own Words...

The diary of the 2nd Earl of Portarlington indicates his continuing preoccupation over a long period with the building of Emo Court:

1817 Feb 1: Put up the hall door
 1818 Jan 16: Put up the new lamp in the hall
 1818 Mar 11: Put up the new chimney piece in my room
 1818 Oct 9: Began to paper the breakfast room
 1818 Dec 13: Finished the library
 1822 Dec 28: Masons left off building
 1823 Feb 24: Masons began building
 1824 Sept 28: Began to finish the new bedroom
 1824 Oct 9: Laid the first stone of the front portico
 1824 Nov 13: Finished the columns of portico
 1825 Oct 1: Finished the front portico
 1826 Sept 25: Finished ceiling of portico & finished the staircase
 1827 Apr 13: Finished hall door
 1827 Nov 17: New slated the larder
 1829 Apr 22: Williamson here and took five of my plans of the house
 1829 Dec 2: Laid the first stone of the new offices at the corner of the house
 1830 Jul 23: Laid the first stone of wall of back portico at 8am

1830 Oct 28: Finished the sunk fence bank of the house
 1832 May 11: Mr. Vulliamy architect left for London
 1832 Sept 15: Finished the base course of portico at back of the house; put up the two large mahogany sashes in the windows of the two wings in front of the house
 1832 Sept 29: Finished painting the outside of the mahogany sashes in front of the house
 1832 Oct 2: Laid the first Portland stone of the area wall opposite the dining room
 1833 Jan 10: Finished putting up the hypocaust under the library and staircase by Mr McKean of Dawson Street
 1833 Feb 2: Finished the new wine cellar under the front portico
 1834 Sept 24: Finished putting up the marble door case in hall
 1834 Sept 29: Commenced doing the back front of the house with Roman cement
 1839 Nov 29: Carpenter finished the dining room
 1839 Dec 10: Finished putting up the hall doors into saloon
 1839 Dec 30: Began unpacking the books in the library and lighted a fire therein
 1840 Feb 1: Dined in new dining room for the first time

(Diary of John Dawson, the 2nd Earl of Portarlington: with acknowledgement to John S. Powell 'Shot a Buck')

Lady Carlow writes about the visit of some neighbours to Dawson Court in October 1778 (Gleanings from an Old Portfolio):

"Lord and Lady de Vesci and Sir Robert and Lady Staples have been here since Thursday, and I think them very pleasant people to have in the house, for they don't require to be entertained. The gentlemen went a-hunting this morning with Mr. Archdale's hounds which are kept here close to the house; as to us ladies, we contented ourselves with sitting over the fire, and working; but we have a fine riot in the house, for they have each of them a son at school at Portarlington, and we sent for them to remain here as long as they stay, and the children are so happy that they make noise enough to stun one. In the evening we have a very good whist party and a working party at each side of the fire."

Viscount Carlow remembers an interesting episode in the basement of Emo Court in the late 19th century:

"I remember how my grandfather [the 5th Earl of Portarlington] won a lot of money on the Riviera, and, being an amateur photographer and connoisseur of good wine, spent his winnings on several cases of champagne, and what was described as a camera 'large enough for the two children to go to bed in', with which he duly arrived back at Emo. A subterranean room next to the cellar was equipped as a dark room, and into this my grandfather would disappear for hours on end to develop his plates, helped by the butler. Being next to the cellar, he didn't think it unwise to wander in and refresh himself from the chemical atmosphere in the dark room; and the times were not infrequent when a bottle of 1874 hock was poured into a dish of hypo in mistake for a bromide or some other fixing solution. In fact the number and variety of chemicals which became inadvertently mixed were so many and so frequent that the explosion which removed one side of the butler's moustache and side whiskers could scarcely have been unexpected!"