

Lurgan Park Heritage Trail

1. Start

Hello and welcome to the Lurgan Park Heritage Trail. This trail tells the story of the Park's history over the last 350 years, while highlighting some of the historic events and people connected with it. This anticlockwise trail will take about an hour to complete, with 11 stops of interest along the way.

Remember to listen to all the facts before moving on to the next point.

To begin the trail, walk forward and turn right onto the Lime tree lined tarmac path, known as the 'Great Avenue'...

2. Beginnings

Whilst the landscape that we enjoy here today in the Park may look natural, it is actually an artificial creation which owes much to the Brownlow family of Derbyshire.

John and William Brownlow, a father-son partnership, first arrived here in 1610, to take control of land, which was granted to them by King James I as part of his Ulster Plantation scheme. By taking land from the rebellious Gaelic chiefs and giving it to loyal English and Scottish settlers like the Brownlows, the King hoped that the province of Ulster would become more pacified and easier to manage – but unsurprisingly, the action caused bitter resentment which exploded into violence during the 1641 rebellion when the Gaelic inhabitants tried unsuccessfully to take back their lands.

The Brownlows brought six carpenters, six labourers, a mason and a tailor with them to their new home. They soon established a market town, which they named Lurgan, after the Irish word '*an lorgain*', referring to the 'shin shaped ridge' which the town was built on. By 1619, it is recorded that the town comprised 42 houses occupied by English families, paved streets, two watermills and a windmill.

Close to their town, the Brownlows built a castle residence for themselves, which occupied the site of the current Brownlow House. Adjoining the castle was a large area of marshy ground. In 1660 William Brownlow's grandson, Arthur Chamberlain Brownlow, who lived between 1645 and 1711, inherited the castle and estate. Arthur was a man of culture and ambition. He was an Irish speaker and antiquarian, who collected old Irish language manuscripts. He was also a man of enterprise, and through his efforts linen manufacture was introduced into Lurgan, where a linen market was also established. By 1708 the rapidly expanding town was observed to be almost entirely people by linen weavers. Linen manufacture would remain the backbone of the Lurgan economy for the next 300 years.

By the late 1600s, the money generated by the emerging linen industry allowed Arthur to embark on plans to transform the waste marshy ground into a beautiful demesne park which would provide a more attractive setting for his castle, thus marking the beginning of Lurgan Park's history.

The Great Avenue you are walking along is one of the results of Arthur's park masterplan. Continue to walk straight along the Avenue. Look out for the second left-hand turn, where you will hear more about the development of the Park...

3. Creating the Demesne

Although it is unclear when Arthur Chamberlain Brownlow commenced work on creating his demesne park, we do know, thanks to a map of the demesne created by the cartographer Patrick Dougan, that many of his ideas had been completed by 1751.

Arthur's park design followed the popular trends of the time among the landowning class. It consisted of a wooded landscape, with trees and evergreen hedges laid out geometrically in compartments and crisscrossed with walks and avenues creating straight vistas.

Dominating Arthur's demesne was an artificial lake, dug by hand, which on Dougan's map is labelled the Mill Dam; referring to the fact that water was released from the Lake to power the waterwheels of nearby mills.

To the south-west of the Lake was the 'Great Avenue', which stretched diagonally for half a mile from the present day Avenue Road to the south east front of the old castle. Visitors approached the castle along this Lime tree lined road until the early 1800s when the main castle entrance was moved to Windsor Avenue. The Avenue was then realigned to its current orientation to provide a straight shaded walk within the demesne, which we continue to enjoy today.

Arthur's grandson William Brownlow, who lived between 1726 and 1794, completed the transformation of the demesne into the Park we love today. Upon inheriting the estate William began to landscape the demesne to his tastes from the 1750s.

Under his direction the demesne was enlarged to cover an area of some 300 acres, which today would incorporate Lurgan Park, Lurgan Golf Club, and parts of Castle Lane and Windsor Avenue. Oak, Beech, Sycamore, Elm, Lime and Chestnut trees were planted individually and in clumps throughout the demesne to provide natural, picturesque views. Decorative garden structures and follies including a temple, obelisk and shell house were constructed to create landscapes that were reminiscent of classical Greece or Rome, following the new garden fashions of the time. The Lake was enlarged to its current size and winding paths were installed around it to give tantalizing glimpses of the Castle through the wooded cover. Belts of trees were planted around the demesne perimeter to provide privacy, while an outer boundary wall was constructed around the demesne using rubble stone. Large sections of this wall still stand today along the Kilmore Road, the Antrim Road and North Street.

The works were largely completed by the 1770s, and the full effect was described by Arthur Young in his 1776 travel journal '*A Tour in Ireland*':

'[William Brownlow] has made very great improvements in his demesne: he has a lake at the bottom of a slight vale, and around are three walks, at a distance from each other; the centre one is the principal and extends two miles. It is well conducted for leading to the most agreeable parts of the grounds and for commanding views of Loch Neagh, and the distant country; there are several buildings, a temple, greenhouse etc. The most beautiful scene is from a bench on a gently swelling hill, which rises almost on every side from the water. The wood, the water, and the green slopes here unite to form a very pleasing landscape for the recreation of the townsfolk. The parks are well stocked with deer and numerous hares sport through every part of the demesne.'

Now let's get going again. Take the next left turn and walk along the path. You will cross over an ornate bridge where you can hear the water bubbling in winter. The stream beneath you branches off the Flush River, and feeds the Lake with water. Continue walking until you reach the next stop at the crossroads.

4. Military Action

Over the years the Park has seen many uses and people pass through it. Among them soldiers, who have made use of the open spaces, wooded cover and terrain for training purposes. For example in 1779, the Lurgan Volunteers were raised in response to the perceived threat of a French invasion. The corps of men were drawn from civilians who lived in the area and were led by their Captain, William Brownlow. Dressed in red tunics, with white facings, the Volunteers were armed with brown bess muskets and took part in drills, exercises and parades within the demesne park and in the town.

Over a century later, in 1896, a very convincing character arrived in town claiming that he was acting on behalf of the War Office. The 'Captain' told the people of Lurgan that they needed to prepare for the arrival of 5,000 soldiers who would be camped in the Brownlow's demesne park for six months. The elaborate hoax was later exposed and the charlatan soldier was arrested for,

amongst other things, fraudulently scamming over £350 (approximately £60,000 today) from local contractors.

With the onset of the First World War, the 16th (Pioneer) Battalion, of the Royal Irish Rifles - nicknamed 'The Terrors' – arrived in Lurgan in December 1914. The men were quartered in Brownlow House with the Park and Lake used for training purposes. Evidence of trenches, dug to allow the soldiers to simulate trench warfare, can still be seen in the Park from the air.

Another remnant of the First World War which was visible in the Park until 1940, were two 'trophy guns', captured German howitzers, presented to the Lurgan Council in 1923, which were displayed in the Park on concrete plinths. With the outbreak of World War 2 in 1939, the trophy guns were sold to aid the war effort. Brownlow House and the Park were once again used by the military for training purposes, including the American GIs of General Dwight Eisenhower's D-Day invasion force. Alongside the GIs the people of Lurgan made use of the Park too, with patches turned over for allotments to allow people to Dig for Victory during the hard days of food rationing.

Now let's get going again. Turn left at the junction, and continue straight before taking the first path on your right. You are now following the lakeside trail where the path becomes softer underfoot.

5. Flight

The Park has been home to many flying spectacles, and not just from the birds! According to one account, a very early flight experiment involving balloons took place in the Brownlow's demesne park in 1850. It is recorded that George Arthur Brownlow sent a balloon with a barometer and thermometer into a thunder cloud. Unfortunately for Brownlow, lightning burst his balloon and no scientific breakthrough was made, although he was afterwards called 'Mad Geordie' by his family.

A much more historic flight occurred in 1912 when as part of the first Lurgan Show held in the Park, the Lurgan Agricultural and Recreational Association invited the famous French airman Henri Salmét to perform in one of the first public air displays ever held in Ulster. According to newspaper accounts Salmét's Blériot monoplane took off from the Park *'like a bird, making a magnificent ascent, amid a tumult of cheering'*, rounding the Lake, and landed ten minutes later in the central field, close to where a tug-of-war competition had been in progress. This memorable event would be remembered years after, as it marked the first time that many of the thousands of people in attendance had ever seen an aeroplane fly.

Salmét returned again to Lurgan Show in 1914; and such was the anticipation this time that special trains were laid on from Belfast, while schools and businesses in Lurgan were closed for the day. This time Salmét was joined by a British aviator called Frederick Raynham, who at only 22 years old was already regarded as a 'distinguished aviator'.

Contemporary reports tell us that Raynham began the display in his waterplane. A waterplane had never been seen in Ireland before and the crowd watched as it took off from the Lake and flew above the Park *'in graceful circles, soaring upwards like a bird'*. When Salmét was in the air, *'he showed that he had perfect control of his machine, swooping down towards the ground and rising again in a thrilling manner, and clearing trees as if he were playing at leap frog'*.

For a lucky few, there was the chance to sit in the passenger seat. Among those who could afford the four guineas for a ticket was Mrs. E.A. Robinson, of Robinson & Cleavers department store in Belfast, who was reported as the *'first lady in Ireland to experience the sensation of an aerial journey'*. After landing she commented, *'If I had enough money, I feel as if I should like to fly all afternoon!'*

While you are imagining the planes flying over the Lake, cast your eye over to the small island. This is relatively recent addition to the Park landscape, created in

the late 1980s at the behest of local man Billy Fox to provide a refuge for the swans of the Park.

So many interesting facts, I hope you have learned something new about the area? Continue along the path with the water on your right-hand side, our next stop is just around the corner. Listen out for the swans and ducks on the Lake as you walk along.

6. Brownlow Castle

Framed across the Lake you will be able to see the magnificent Brownlow House, ancestral home of the Brownlow family and lovingly referred to by locals as 'the Castle'. The house occupies the site of an earlier castle built by the Brownlows, which was described in 1629 as '*stone and brick layered with lime, three storeys high*'. It was surrounded by a defensive wall, called a bawn, which was 14 feet high. The defences came into use in 1641, when a rebellion broke out across Ireland, as the Gaelic chiefs tried to take back the land which had been taken from them during the Ulster Plantation. In Lurgan, William Brownlow allowed the town's inhabitants to shelter behind the wall of his castle as an insurgent force approached. Following a brief siege, terms were agreed to allow the settler's safe passage and the castle gates were opened. The rebels though abandoned the agreement, attacking the townsfolk, plundering the castle and taking William Brownlow and his family hostage. When the rebellion was finally quashed, the Brownlows were released from their captivity and returned to their castle, which they repaired and extended over the next 200 years.

The old castle, described in 1802 as an '*antique castle*', stood until the 1830s, when Charles Brownlow, the First Lord Lurgan, decided to build a new home for himself. Built from Scottish sandstone to a design by the celebrated Edinburgh architect William Henry Playfair, work on Brownlow House was largely completed by 1842. It has been suggested that the Scottish influence in the house's construction, may have been attempt by Charles to impress his Scottish wife Jane MacNeill, whom he married in 1828.

Brownlow House is regarded as one of the finest pieces of architecture in Ulster. It is said to have been originally built as a 'Calendar House'; with four wings, one for each season; seven doors, one for each day of the week; 12 exterior corners for each month of the year; 54 chimneys for each week of the year; and are ready....365 rooms, one for each day of the year.

Although most of what we see today dates to the 1830s, elements of the older castle remain in the remodelled stables and servant quarters, which can be identified through the use of local black basalt stone.

In 1893 the Brownlow family vacated Lurgan, with their House eventually bought by the Lurgan District Loyal Orange Lodge in 1904 for £2,000, making it the largest Orange Hall in the world.

In 1996, a devastating fire destroyed large parts of the house and it required a £5 million investment to restore it to its current outstanding condition. Today Brownlow House operates as a popular wedding and conference venue, which boasts an excellent café and museum exhibitions. If you have time why not pop in and treat yourself!

Continue in an anticlockwise direction along the path, past the play park until you reach our next stop at the Lake...

7. Lake

It is hard to believe that once upon a time the area in front of you was once a marshy wasteland. Its transformation owes much to the vision of Arthur Brownlow, who dreamed of a lake as the centrepiece of a beautiful demesne park which his castle overlooked. It is unclear when work began on making Arthur's wishes a reality, but we do know that it was mostly completed by 1751 as it features on a map of the demesne by Patrick Dougan.

Creating the Lake was an immense technical challenge which required a hollow to be dug out, the construction of ramparts and a dam to contain the expanse of

water and the digging of streams to feed the Lake with water from the Flush River. The backbreaking work was all carried out by hand – in fact it is said that the phrase 'a face as long as a Lurgan Spade' may originate from the sad, long faces which the poorly paid workers had while digging out the Lake! Others have also claimed the term actually relates to a type of spade produced in Lurgan – we'll leave it up to you to decide which is right!

As well as having an ornamental decorative purpose, the Lake had a practical purpose. Water was channelled from the Lake, described as a 'Mill Dam' on Dougan's map, to power the waterwheels of nearby mills. In fact in nearby North Street, one of these corn mills (known as Soyes Mill) still partially stands today.

The Lake was later expanded to its current size as part of the improvements made to the demesne by Arthur's grandson William Brownlow in the 1750s. At this time a boathouse was built too on the lake edge to house a pleasure boat which William had purchased in 1753. A swan house was also constructed to house the Lake's most famous residents!

It is interesting to note too that a second smaller lake was dug out to the rear of the Castle on the present day site of St. Peter's GAA club. It is probable that this Lake was used to control the water levels which were released to power the mills. By the mid-1800s this smaller Lake had been filled in. This Lake is however memorialised in the road name Lake Street leading to the north of the demesne.

The Lake has provided recreational, sporting and, occasionally, illegal pastimes since the demesne became a public park in 1909. In the past, rowing boats were available for hire. While afloat, the pleasure seekers may have tried some angling, with coarse fish, eels and even 20lb pikes taken from the waters. In 1915, newspapers reported that two unfortunate poachers were caught red-handed while trying to retrieve their catch from a 100 yard fishing line, on which they had attached 63 baited hooks.

The Lake has been known to completely freeze over during severe winter weather. Inevitably, in the past, this would attract dozens of daring and intrepid skaters who took the opportunity to enjoy a day or two on the ice. In fact it was even reported that there were 'starlit balls' as couples skated together on the ice late into the night. When signs of the thaw appeared, everyone went to the bog meadows, near Lough Neagh, where the waterlogged fields had also frozen and made a much safer alternative.

Has anyone ever told you, 'you have a face like a Lurgan spade'? Well, now you know where the expression comes from. To move on, turn your back to the Lake and head towards the tall tree in the middle of the grass area. Sit on the bench that raps around the knobbly tree and listen to AE Russells life story.

8. AE Russell Seat

This grand old lime tree has been named in honour of one of Lurgan's most accomplished sons - George Russell, who lived between 1867 and 1935. 'AE' as he was nicknamed, was a celebrated writer and poet, a much admired artist and a hugely influential economic and political thinker. He was the central figure in the Irish Cultural and Literary Revival, and a constant voice of reason throughout Ireland's most turbulent years from 1890 and 1930.

He was born at 12 William Street, Lurgan on 10 April 1867. Here he lived until 1870, when his family then moved to the gate lodge, located on the Back Lane; the old name for North Street and so called because it formed the back entrance to Brownlow's demesne. The gate lodge, regrettably demolished, was a small and comfortable house, which was within easy walking distance of the Lurgan Model School which AE attended on Brownlow Terrace. AE resided at the lodge with his parents and sister until 1878, when the family then relocated to Dublin.

Living on the edge of the Brownlow's estate meant that the young AE had easy access to the demesne's beautiful landscaped grounds. Here AE spent many hours playing with his sister and friends. His experiences would live with him

long after he left Lurgan. He later wrote that '*beauty first dawned*' on him at the age of 4 or 5, when he '*strayed into a park, and...lay flat on [the] grass overcome by some enchantment flickering about a clump of daffodils*'. Many of his later paintings reflect the imagery that surrounded him during his childhood in Lurgan, especially the trees, Lake, flowers and parkland of the Brownlow's demesne park.

As for his nickname AE?...According to his son, Diarmuid:

'...his pen name "Æ" came about because of his illegible handwriting; a printer could not make out the pen name "Æon" attached to an article, and printed as much as he could make out — the first two letters!'

Take a moment to take in the beauty of the Park. When you are ready, return to the path, and with your back towards the Lake, walk towards our next stop at the Fountain...

9. Fountain

This iconic feature of the Park traces its origins back to April 1897, when the people of Lurgan assembled in the Town Hall to form a committee to decide how they were going to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Several suggestions were proposed until it was agreed that they would build '*a handsome Fountain in the Mall, with an enclosure for flowers or a grass plot*'.

The funds for the Fountain were raised by public subscription. By June, on the eve of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, almost £200 had been collected and the Coalbrookdale foundry, in Shropshire, were asked to design and build it. Five months later, the Jubilee Fountain, with four ornate gas lamps, was erected in front of the 'Big Church' in Church Place.

The Fountain became a popular attraction. On warm days, children splashed in the water and caused mischief; on more serious occasions, crowds gathered for rallies and demonstrations and speakers stood on the steps to address the

crowds. However, its time in the town centre was short, with complaints that *'in its present position the fountain was a nuisance'* and, in 1911, it was re-located to where it stands today in Lurgan Park.

In 1928, the Lurgan War Memorial was unveiled, coincidentally built in the Mall on the site vacated by the Jubilee Fountain, 17 years earlier.

While you are here have a look at the gate lodge behind you. This lodge was built in 1909, as a residence for the Council Park-Keeper; who was responsible for looking after the newly opened Public Park. Outside the lodge an old fire bell was hung which the keeper would ring to signal the Park's closing times!

Now continue along the perimeter path in an anticlockwise direction towards the tennis pavilion to our next stop where you will find out more about the opening of the public Park.

10. From Demesne to Public Park

The Brownlows connection with the Park ended in 1893 after the Third Lord Lurgan, William Brownlow, married Emily Julia Cadogan, daughter of the 5th Earl of Cadogan. Emily refused to move from England to live in Lurgan, forcing Brownlow to sell his house and demesne lands to a consortium called the Lurgan Real Property Company, a real estate company who had little regard for historic landscape. Hundreds of mature trees across the demesne were subsequently felled and sold for timber including the grand old trees of the Great Avenue; while demesne land was sold piecemeal for housing development beginning with Windsor Avenue.

Fortunately for us, in 1907 the Lurgan Urban District Council had the foresight to purchase 73 acres comprising the southern part of the demesne from the Company to establish a public park for the health and wellbeing of the town. At a meeting the chairman of the Council, W.G. MacGeagh, remarked that it was the last thing the ratepayers would begrudge paying rates for as they all knew the factory work in which the majority of Lurgan people were engaged was very confined, and he knew of no town requiring an open free breathing space more.

Joseph Cheal, a landscape gardener from Crawley, England, was appointed to layout the new public Park, which included the replanting of the trees of the Great Avenue. Lurgan Park, the second largest urban Park in Ireland behind Phoenix Park in Dublin, was officially opened on 31 July 1909 by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Aberdeen and his wife Lady Aberdeen.

Since then, the Park has seen many changes and improvements. Tree planting and careful management has returned natural assets to the beautiful landscape. During the twentieth century, it was not unusual to find sheep and cattle grazing in the open spaces. At one stage, there was an aviary and petting park and the walking trails, playground, sports facilities and other public amenities make it a widely used and a popular asset for the people of Lurgan. In recognition of this, the Park has been awarded Green Flag status for its high quality recreational and environmental spaces.

Aside from the many recreational and sporting pastimes associated with the Park - it has also been the location for major events and special occasions, not least the annual Lurgan Show. The first agricultural show, organised by the Lurgan Union Farming Society, was held in the Mall and market place back in 1846 and it wasn't until 1912 that the present day show was established here in the Park. Almost every year since then, rural life and farming is showcased here every June, with participants and spectators arriving from across the British Isles.

In more recent times, the UK Pipe Band Championships brought large crowds of people to the Park to enjoy some of the best pipers and drummers in the world.

You're nearly finished, continue along the path to the tennis courts and bowling pavilion to the final point. Here, you will hear all about the different types of sports in the Park...

11. Sport

The wide paths and open spaces in the Park have been used by the sporting people of Lurgan since the nineteenth century, with golf, bowls, tennis, athletics, motorsport and cricket all taking place here over the last 175 years.

Lawn bowls and tennis have always been popular in Lurgan and the first bowling green and tennis courts were opened in 1913. Both sports remain favourites and modern facilities are available in the Park today.

Charles Brownlow, the Second Lord Lurgan, had many sporting interests. Most famously, he owned one of the most successful greyhounds in history – Master McGrath. The hound was bought by Brownlow in Waterford and was raised and kennelled here on the Brownlow demesne. He went on to win the prestigious Waterloo Cup three times – 1868, 1869 and 1871 – which was then the Premier League of its day! Master McGrath was so famous that the greyhound was brought to London by Brownlow to meet Queen Victoria, at the monarch's request! A statue of Master McGrath can be seen in the town centre.

Charles Brownlow is also associated with the beginnings of cricket in Lurgan. Back in the 1850s he established the Lurgan Demesne Cricket Club, which played in district leagues during the summer, with Brownlow as Captain, of course! Professional players were even employed to train the team. Cricket continues to be played in the Park today, with the Victoria Cricket Club calling the Park its home since 1954.

The Second Lord Lurgan was also the patron for a major amateur athletics meeting on the demesne in September 1871. This became an annual competition which was held for several years, bringing talented athletes from across the country. In 1913, the *Lurgan Times* reported that '*after a lapse of many years, athletics, for which the town of Lurgan was once celebrated, was revived*' and a successful meeting was held in the Park. Cross country running took precedence at the local athletic clubs and, in 1926, the inaugural H.C. Malcolm Cup welcomed 137 competitors from across Ulster to race each other over a rigorous six mile course around the Park. Today the running tradition continues in the Park with regular park runs held throughout the year.

Four wheel speedsters took to the paths in 1980 when the Park was included as a stage of the Circuit of Ireland rally. The following year, the drivers returned to the tree-lined course for what became the Lurgan Park Rally, and these exciting races continued until 2017.

Now continue to follow the path back to your starting point...

12. Finish

You have now come to the end of the Heritage Trail!

We hope you've enjoyed learning about the history of the Park and the surrounding area.

Congratulations, you have walked just over a mile. Did you know walking is a great way to stay fit and healthy? A brisk walk in nature can help boost your mood, reduce stress, and improve your concentration. Try walking a little further each day. Every step counts!

*Thank you for coming to Lurgan Park today.
Please come again soon and try one of our other audio trails.*

Safe home