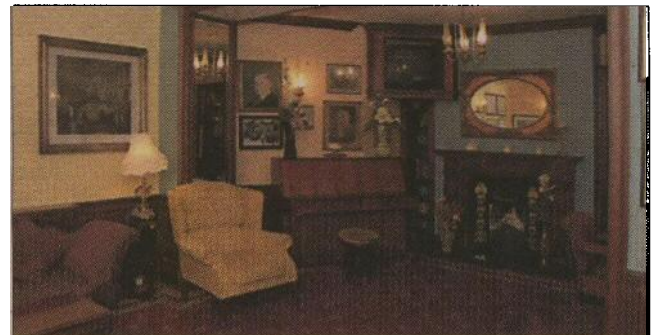


The Woodenbridge Hotel, Co Wicklow — the new and the old.



# Celebrating 400 years of touristic excellence

by Mark Twomey

**Q**UITE often, when venturing from Cork, I tend to head west when it comes to taking a two-night leisure break. The nearby coast of West Cork, the mountain ranges of Co Kerry and the Atlantic coast stretching from Co Clare through Galway and up to Co Mayo have always held their appeal.

Recently though, I had an opportunity to venture into the great unknown, eastwards, and headed up to Co Wicklow, or the Garden of Ireland as it is better known in travel circles.

Our destination was the Woodenbridge Hotel in the Vale of Avoca at Woodenbridge, a couple of miles before Avoca on the road to Aughrim from Arklow. The hotel is this year celebrating a 400th anniversary based on the fact that a coaching house or travellers inn has been in situ since 1608.

Rebuilt once or twice, the original section of the current incarnation of the hotel dates back to 1730, extra sections

have been added on over the years, and the most recent addition is the 'Lodge' section of the hotel which was built three years ago.

Located across the street featuring 40 guest bedrooms on the riverside, this section also houses Il Ruscello, an exceptional Italian restaurant of which restaurant critic Paulo Tullio said: "I was impressed with the cooking because it was so precise, as well as being entirely faithful to its regional roots."

This restaurant, in addition to the Redmond restaurant (within the hotel), combine to create a unique advantage to a two-night break — you can have a different meal in two restaurants over two nights without having to go further than 100 yards.

And food also plays an important part of the hotel offering in this anniversary year; as an alternative to the regular table d'Hôte menu, guests will be given

The Woodenbridge hotel is one of Ireland's oldest hotels (1608) located in the Wicklow mountains national park, Ireland. It was here that Michael Collins, hero of the War of Independence, engaged in secret meetings with British Intelligence in February 1922

the option of ordering from the historic 'four centuries of food' menu. Designed by a druid chef, the menu features among others hare broth, apple and potato fritters and partridge also features.

Golfers will be especially pleased with the Woodenbridge Golf Club, whose entrance is located across from the hotel, daily green fees are payable for this course which stretches through the Vale of Avoca, perhaps one of the most beautiful locations to play golf in Ireland.

The village of Avoca, the location for the hit '90s TV series Ballykissangel, is nearby and this is the location for the oldest weavers in Ireland, Avoca hand-weavers, offering demonstrations of old weaving techniques as well as a craft shop and visitor centre.

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