

THE FORMAL opening of Curragh Chase Caravan and Camping Park on the 25th June by An Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, was a pleasant and interesting occasion. The facilities provided at the park should now encourage many visitors to halt awhile at Curragh Chase, where there is so much to be enjoyed in the way of woods, lakes, walks and wildlife.

Published to coincide with the opening of the Curragh Chase Park was a 70 page booklet entitled "The Abiding Enchantment of Curragh Chase" and subtitled "A Big House Remembered." The author, Joan Wynne Jones (nee de Vere), was one of the last members of the de Vere family to grow up in Curragh Chase. Her mother, Mrs. Isabel de Vere was, in fact, the last de Vere owner of Curragh Chase.

Joan Wynne Jones and her husband attended the opening of the Park, and I had the pleasure of meeting them both, and sitting with them for a chat at a picnic table in the warm sunshine of that lovely June afternoon. Here the author of "The Abiding Enchantment of Curragh Chase"

# Enchantment of Curragh Chase

autographed a copy of the book for me.

The book is a fascinating one. The first sections give a brief summary of the history of the de Vere family. The original name of the family was Hunt. A Henry Hunt married the daughter of Aubrey de Vere, second son of the 16th Earl of Oxford. Because of this connection with the de Vere family, the 17th century Hunts took the prefix Vere, and became known as the Vere Hunts. Then, in 1833, Sir Aubrey de Vere Hunt of Curragh Chase assumed by Royal Licence the surname and arms of de Vere only.

Two sons of Sir Aubrey are well remembered. They were Aubrey de Vere, the poet, and Stephen de Vere. The latter was very popular with the local people, because of his great humanitarian work for the poor during the period of the Great Famine of the 1840's and its aftermath. Both he and Aubrey became Catholics, having been influenced by the

Oxford movement. Aubrey was friendly with all the leading literary luminaries of his time, including Tennyson, Wordsworth, Coventry Patmore and John Ruskin. Tennyson spent five weeks in Curragh Chase in 1848.

The story of the de Vere family in Curragh Chase is known, to some extent, to most people in Co. Limerick. Where one gets new insights into Curragh Chase is in Joan Wynne Jones's details of those who lived there, and her descriptions of the house and its contents, and of her youth spent in the happy surroundings of the house and the very extensive woodlands which lay all about it.

Many family heirlooms and treasures perished when the house was accidentally destroyed by fire in 1941. These included manuscripts of some of Tennyson's and Wordsworth's poems, and letters written by them, as well as much correspondence from Cardinal Newman. A cross,

said to have been worn by King Charles I on the scaffold, was badly burned, and its charred remains are now in the Limerick City Museum.

The house was never wired for electricity. Joan Wynne Jones, who was born in 1913, says: "In my early days there were a number of acetylene fittings and lights, and a plant for making gas in the yard, but the pipes became unsafe and we fell back on those large brass paraffin standard lamps . . . and silver carrying candle sticks with snuffers like witches' hats attached.

Water for drinking purposes was obtained from a Holy Well a quarter of a mile away, and water required for other purposes was pumped up from the lake by a "ram".

Joan Wynne Jones also tells us that Curragh Chase House 'was considered to be one of the most haunted houses in Ireland', and she mentioned several incidents to back up that claim. She herself regularly heard strange knockings on

her bedroom door, and heard 'desolate moans and sobbings' coming from behind a blocked up doorway. A young boy visiting the house told how a strange little boy came to play with him during the night. 'Many years later, when alterations were being made to the house, the coffin of a child, with skeleton inside, was found underneath the floorboards of this particular room.'

During the Civil War period, the author of "The Abiding Enchantment of Curragh Chase" remembers climbing out on to the flat roof of the house to watch the Battle of Adare proceed five miles away. Eighteen pounder guns were being used by the Free State forces in their assault on the Republican positions in the village.

Joan Wynne Jones truly describes herself as a child of nature. She becomes lyrical as she describes the flora and fauna she so much enjoyed as a child in Curragh Chase: the infinite variety of trees and