

CATHLEEN BENSON writes about the home of famous poet Aubrey de Vere.

MANY of the great houses of Ireland have a romantic but often tragic story, and Curragh Chase, Co. Limerick, home of poet Aubrey de Vere, is no exception.

A stark ruin of a cut-stone house, almost parallel in line across from Mount Trenchard, it looks impressive still. The house was burned accidentally in 1941 and was never reconstructed. There is a painting in The National Gallery by the 18th century artist, R. A. Mulcahy, showing Curragh Chase in all the splendour of its architectural design and the pastoral beauty of its setting.

The Forestry Department have taken over the estate and what remains of the buildings and with good taste and affection have restored the grounds to their pristine state.

What a variety of beautiful trees we can see here! They are the Douglas fir, the redwoods, pines and spruces from the west coast of North America, from Europe the silver firs, white spruce and larch, walnut, chestnut, the Cryptomeria Japonica from Japan and the mighty cedar from the Lebanon planted in 1836.

Here the poet Aubrey de Vere, friend of Wordsworth and Tennyson, composed most of his poetry. Tennyson came here in 1848 and stayed for five weeks. During that visit he crossed over by boat from Tarbert to Clare. At that time there was a regular daily steam passenger boat operating from Limerick and calling at Foynes and Tarbert and Glin, on to Kilrush. Tennyson went by road to Kilkee and was greatly impressed by the famous Diamond Rocks. To commemorate the occasion he wrote one of his best known poems.

Break, break, break,
On thy cold grey stones, O sea!
Close by the great cedar of
Lebanon one finds a small
tombstone;

Not one of them is forgotten
before God,
Horses, Peter, Thora, Tomy, Dun
Charlie, Billie,
Dogs, Jacob, Garry, Patsi, Betty,
Ranger,
Cats, Blackie, Hadji, Puss.

The de Vere family are spoken of with deep affection by the local people. The estate is now open to the public, but in a way it was always open. Stephen de Vere brought many a sick peasant to his own house. During the Great Famine he travelled by ship among the passengers fleeing from poverty.

THE ENCHANTMENT OF CURRAGH CHASE

He reported on the appalling conditions on board to the British Governments and as a result, new shipping laws were brought into action.

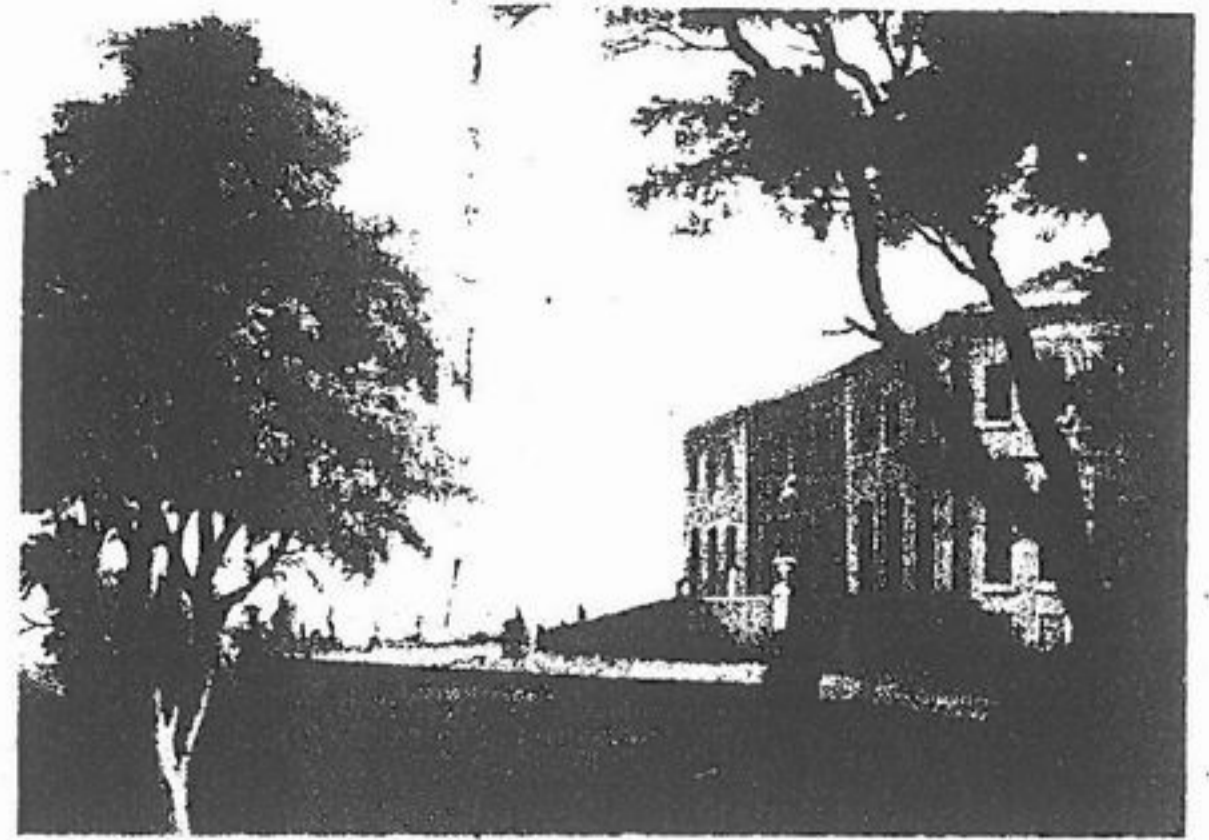
Aubrey and Stephen never married. In later life they became members of the Catholic Church under the guidance of Cardinal Newman, who was a friend of the family. Sadly, all the correspondence was destroyed in the great fire. Mrs. Joan Wynne Jones, of Cork, only direct descendant of the de Vere family, writes:

"A large door off the hall led to a supposedly fire-proof safe which held, among other things, manuscripts of Tennyson and Wordsworth which had been given to Aubrey de Vere, along with considerable correspondence between the poet and Cardinal Newman, covering the time when Aubrey and his brother, Sir Stephen de Vere, were preparing to become members of the Roman Catholic Church. Sadly, the fire did penetrate the safe and destroyed all its irreplaceable contents.

"Elsewhere, in the drawing room, the cross believed to have been worn by Charles I at his execution was also burned in the fire and now its charred remains are in Limerick Museum with a few other items that were saved from the blaze".

Aubrey once told his niece that theology was the great romance of his life, more important to him than poetry. He wrote,

"Curragh Chase is to me haunted ground, it really seems to me a sort of enchantment; in every room of the house and



no one could fancy could live in the memory . . ."

Mrs. Joan Wynne Jones's son, Vere Wynne Jones, one of R.T.E.'s most popular broadcasters, recalls the same enchantment that enveloped him in childhood when he came here to spend happy holidays fishing and hunting in the grounds of Curragh Chase, home of one of Ireland's noblest families.

every walk of the garden and woods, I see again the old gestures, expressions of face, even accidents of dress which

A BALLAD OF SARSFIELD or The Bursting of the Guns

By Aubrey de Vere

Sarsfield rode out, the
Dutch to rout
And to take and break their
cannon;
To Mass went he at half-past
three
And at four he crossed the
Shannon.

oooOooo

Tyrconnel slept. In dream
his thoughts
Old fields of victory ran on;
And the chieftains of
Thomond in Limerick's
towers
Slept well by the banks of
the Shannon.

oooOooo

He rode ten miles and he
crossed the ford
And couched in the wood
and waited;
Till, left and right on
marched in sight
That host which the true
men hated.

oooOooo

"Charge!" Sarsfield cried;
and the green hillside
As they charged replied in
thunder;
They rode o'er the plain, and
they rode o'er the slain
And the rebel rout lay
under!

oooOooo

He burned the gear the
knaves held dear—
For his King he fought, not
plunder;
With powder he crammed
the guns, and rammed
Their mouths the red soil
under.

oooOooo

The spark flashed out — like
a nation's shout
The sound into heaven
ascended;
The hosts of the sky made to
earth reply
And the thunders twain
were blended!

oooOooo

Sarsfield rode out the Dutch
to rout
And to take and break their
cannon;
A century after, Sarsfield's
laughter
Was echoed from
Dungannon.