

# ASKEATON CIVIC TRUST



CURRAGH CHASE - HOME OF THE DE VERE FAMILY FROM 1647. (Photo courtesy of Irish Architectural Archives)

## THE DE VERE FAMILY AND CURRAGH CHASE HOUSE

The Irish de Vere's were descendants of the Veres of Norman origin who featured prominently during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

In about 1150 King Stephen conferred the title of Earl of Oxford upon the family and two centuries later Robert Vere was made Duke of Ireland by Richard II. They held the peerage until 1702 when the male line in England died out with the twentieth and last Earl of Oxford. The founder of the Irish branch of the family was Aubrey Vere, second son

of the fifteenth Earl of Oxford and grandfather of the twentieth, who was born in 1555. Historians usually referred to the family as de Veres although Shakespeare refers to Lord Aubrey Vere. The surname Vere seems to have been the more usual form until the nineteenth century.

Aubrey Vere's daughter, Jane, married a Mr. Henry Hunt of Gosfield, Essex, England from which the Irish family derived the name of Hunt. Their grandson, Vere Hunt, a Cromwellian officer,

obtained from the Protector the estate of 'Curragh' near the mouth of the Shannon and settled there in 1647. He also settled in lands at Glangoole, Co. Tipperary in 1657. It seems likely that the property which was then known as 'Currah' was part of the lands which Cromwell had confiscated in Munster and which he gave to his veterans on condition that they exercise English authority over the native population of the district.

Vere Hunt was succeeded by his son John Hunt, born

in 1633, and grandson, Rev. Vere Hunt who died in 1759. The Rev. Hunt's heir, his eldest son, was known as Vere Hunt of Currah, Co. Limerick and Glangoole, Co. Tipperary. He married twice, finally producing an heir, yet another Vere. Vere was appointed Baronet of Ireland on December 4th, 1784, and became Sir Vere Hunt, First Baronet of Currah. Sir Vere died in 1818 and the baronetcy of Currah was inherited by his only son, Aubrey, who in 1832 by Royal licence changed his family name to that of de Vere. Sir Aubrey was a man of letters and culture and a compatriot of many of the literary figures of his era. In 1807 he married Mary Spring Rice, the eldest

daughter of Stephen Edward Rice of Mount Trenchard, near Foynes Co. Limerick who was a sister of the first Lord Mouteagle. They had eight children: Vere the third Baronet, Stephen the fourth Baronet, Aubrey the poet, Ellen who married Robert O'Brien, brother of William Smith O'Brien, leader of the Young Ireland party, Mary, Catherine, William and Horace.

In 1898 Sir Stephen de Vere and his only surviving brother, Aubrey, both unmarried, conveyed their respective estates to their eldest nephew, Major Aubrey Vere O'Brien. This despite Major Horace de Vere, their youngest brother, having married with daughters, as their

father Sir Aubrey had left a proviso in his will that the property should go to a son of a daughter rather than to a daughter of a son. The male line of the Irish de Veres expired on Sir Stephen's death in 1904.

Curragh Chase fell to the major's widow and son, Robert Stephen O'Brien. In anticipation of this they assumed by Royal licence in 1899 the surname and arms of the de Vere's. Robert Stephen Vere de Vere died in 1936 and was survived by his widow Isabel who died in 1959. On Christmas Eve 1941 Curragh Chase House was destroyed by fire.

*In 1957 the estate was purchased by the state and is now used as a Forest Park and Activity Centre.*