

The de Vere Family

(Patrick J. Cronin November 27th. 1997)

The Irish de Vere's were descendants of the Veres of Norman origin who featured prominently during the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1.

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 11. 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 exercised 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 was an MP for the County of Limerick. A somewhat hell-raising gentleman he was ever so popular among the peasants and gentry alike. Sir Vere died in 1818 and the baronetcy of Currah was inherited by his only son, Aubrey, who in 1832 by Royal licence changed the 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. A noted poet and dramatist, he had many of his works published. In 1807 he married Mary Spring Rice, the eldest daughter of Stephen Edward Rice of Mount Trenchard, near Foynes Co. Limerick. Mary Spring Rice was a sister of the first Lord Mounteagle. 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.

Aubrey, the highly acclaimed poet and author was born on January 10th. 1814. An associate of many of the well known poets and writers of the Victorian era, he converted to Catholicism in 1851, being influenced greatly by Cardinal Newman, renowned for his association with the Oxford Movement. A well travelled and highly intellectual man he helped Newman in the setting up of the Catholic University in Dublin in 1852 and delivered a series of lectures on literature. De Vere was appointed professor of '*Political and Social Studies*' at the University. These lectures were published in 1889 in a volume of works entitled '*Essays Chiefly Literary and Ethical.*' Together with his brother Stephen they were not found wanting in their efforts in easing the plight of the Irish people during the Irish Potato Famine. Aubrey was a member of the Relief Committees and Stephen travelled on the '*Coffin Ships*' to Canada to witness first hand the plight of the misfortunate emigrants on board. At home in Curragh Chase the poet devoted his time to writing poetry and sonnets. His best known volume of works entitled, '*Inisfail*' chronicles Irish history from the Norman conquest right up to the repeal of the Penal Laws. This volume has a very Nationalistic flavour and features poems such as '*A Ballad of Athlone,*' '*The March to Kinsale*' and '*A Ballad of Sarsfield.*' Aubrey de Vere passed away on January 21st. 1902 and is laid to rest in Church Street Cemetery, Askeaton.

In 1898 Sir Stephen de Vere and his only surviving brother, Aubrey, both unmarried, conveyed their respective life estates to their eldest nephew, Major Aubrey Vere O'Brien. This despite Major Horace de Vere, their younger 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 Veres. 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 accidentally destroyed by fire. In 1957 the estate was purchased by the state and is now used as a Forest Park and Activity Centre.



Notable Dates

- * *First Hunt-De Vere settled in Curragh Chase in 1647*
- * *Sir Vere Hunt MP for County Limerick 1787*
- * *Aubrey de Vere born January 10th. 1814*
- * *Sir Aubrey de Vere, the poets father contested election of 1820*
- * *Daniel O'Connell won the Clare election in 1828*
- * *Aubrey de Vere entered Trinity College in 1832*
- * *Sir Aubrey changed the family name from Hunt to de Vere in 1833*
- * *Aubrey de Vere graduated from Trinity College in 1841*
- * *De Vere became acquainted with Alfred Tennyson in 1842*
- * *Sir Aubrey de Vere, the poets father died in 1846*
- * *Alfred Tennyson visited Curragh Chase in 1848*
- * *Wordsworth died in 1850*
- * *Aubrey de Vere converted to Catholicism in 1851*
- * *De Vere delivered a series of lectures at the Catholic University in 1852*
- * *Aubrey de Vere the Bard of Curragh Chase died on January 21st. 1902*

A BALLAD OF ATHLONE

*Does any man dream that a Gael can fear,
Of a thousand deeds let him learn but one!
The Shannon swept onward, broad and clear,
Between the Leaguers and worn Athlone.*

*“Break down the bridge!”- Six warriors rushed
Through the storm of shot and the storm of shell:
With late, but certain, victory flushed
The grim Dutch gunners eyed them well.*

*They wrenched at the planks `mid a hail of fire:
They fell in death, their work half done:
The bridge stood fast; and nigh and nigher
The foe swarmed darkly, densely on.*

*“Oh who for Erin will strike a stroke?
“Who hurl yon planks where the waters roar?”
Six warriors forth from their comrades broke,
And flung them upon that bridge once more.*

*Again at the rocking planks they dashed;
And four dropped dead; and two remained:
The huge beams groaned, and the arch down-crashed;-
Two stalward swimmers the margin gained.*

*St. Ruth in his stirrups stood up, and cried,
“I have seen no deed like that in France!”
With a toss of his head Sarsfield replied,
“They had luck, the dogs! `Twas a merry chance!”*

*Oh! many a year upon Shannon’s side
They sang upon moor and they sang upon heath
Of the twain that breasted that raging tide,
And the ten that shook bloody hands with Death!*

THE MARCH TO KINSALE

December, A.D. 1601.

*O'er many a river bridged with ice,
Through many a vale with snow-drifts dumb,
Past quaking fen and precipice
The Princes of the North are come!
Lo, these are they that year by year
Roll'd back the tide of England's war;-
Rejoice, Kinsale! thy help is near!
That wondrous winter march is o'er.
And thus they sang, "To-morrow morn
"Our eyes shall rest upon the foe:
"Roll on, swift night in silence borne,
"And blow, thou breeze of sunrise, blow!"*

*Blithe as a boy on march'd the host
With droning pipe and clear-voiced harp;
At last above that southern coast
Rang out their war-steed's whinny sharp:
And up the sea-salt slopes they wound,
And airs once more of ocean quaff'd;
Those frosty woods the rocks that crown'd
As though May touch'd them waved and laugh'd.
And thus they sang, "To-morrow morn
"Our eyes shall rest upon our foe:
"Roll on, swift night, in silence borne,
"And blow, thou breeze of sunrise, blow!"*

*Beside their watch fires couch'd all night
Some slept, some laugh'd, at cards some play'd,
While, chaunting on a central height
Of moonlit crag, the priesthood pray'd:
And some to sweetheart, some to wife
Sent message kind; while others told
Triumphant tales of recent fight,
Or legends of their sires of old.
And thus they sang, "To-morrow morn
"Our eyes at last shall see the foe;
"Roll on, swift night, in silence borne,
"And blow, thou breeze of sunrise, blow!"*

BOOK



Aubrey de Vere
The Bard of Curragh Chase

*"A Portrait of his life and
Writings"*

By
Patrick J. Cronin



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