

DUNMORE HOUSE

By Rev. T. J. Clohosey

IN THE 17th century one of the great mansions in Ireland was Dunmore House, which belonged to the Ormonds. The manor of Dunmore was originally granted to the De Druhulls immediately after the Norman Invasion. From them the ownership passed to the De la Frenes sometime before 1382 when Robert De le Frene executed a deed of entailment. In 1452 Patrick fitzFulco de la Frene disposed of the manor of Dunmore with other property to Edmund fitz Richard Butler, better known to Gaelic writers as Edmund macRichard. In the following year he built the "Bawn of Dunmore."

About a century later in 1545 James, Earl of Ormond, left in his will the manor of Dunmore to his wife Dame Johan Fitzgeralde. Some years after Patrick Den of the Grenan (Thomastown) rented the place for nine years at £43 6s. 8d. a year, but three years later Leonard Blanchvill rented it for 21 years at the same. A lease of 1593 states that 12 couples of rabbits be sent each week to the Earl's Houses of Kilkenny, Gowran and Dunmore. In the following year Thomas, Earl of Ormond made his will and left the manor of Dunmore to his wife. However he did not die till 1614 and before this the property had been granted to his daughter, Elizabeth, on her marriage to Theobald Lord Tulloughlim. After the death of her first husband Elizabeth writes to her father, "I have delivered up all those evidences unto Sir Walter's hand which concerned Dunmore which and all other writings that concerned my portion I doubt not your Lordship will cause to be safe kept for my use and that you will do nothing that shall prejudice the estate already passed unto me of the same." Soon afterwards she married James Preston, Earl of Desmond. On the death of Black Thomas, his nephew, Walter, succeeded, but the Earl of Desmond claimed part of the Ormond estate by right of his marriage. To please his favourite, the Duke of Bucking-

ham, who hated the Ormonds, James I decided the quarrel and awarded Kilkenny, the house of Dunmore, etc., to the Earl of Desmond. Hence we find Lady Elizabeth Butler, now Countess of Desmond, in residence at Dunmore House in December, 1623, and she continued living here for many years. In a postscript to a letter she encloses a note of "the breadth and length of the hangings that must be had for the great chamber of Dunmore." In 1629 a friend of hers, Henry Slanes, writes for permission to live in a part of Dunmore House while he was building a house in the neighbourhood—at least, while she was abroad.

Sir John Davies, writing somewhat earlier than this, says that in his day the only park in Ireland stored with deer was Dunmore.

The marriage of James, Earl of Ormond to the daughter of the Earl Desmond brought all the Kilkenny property back into Butler hands again. With the execution of King Charles and the exile of Ormond the fortunes of the Butlers were temporarily in eclipse but not completely. The Countess immediately approached the Cromwellian government and even personally interviewed Cromwell himself and was graciously received by him. By order of Parliament, February, 1653, it was decided to set apart for the portion of the Countess of Ormond and her children the house called Dunmore House, near Kilkenny together with lands of the yearly value of £2,000 "which were sometime the lands of her father or mother and later in possession of the Earl of Ormond." The Earl was on no account to benefit by this grant. In the August following she was furnished with the necessary papers of recommendation to the Irish Administrators and was able to set out for Dublin. Not till 1657, however, did she move to Dunmore with her family. She resolutely set about retrieving her estates "applying herself to tillage and country life."

With the restoration of the monarchy the Ormond fortunes are again in the ascendant, and the family estates reach their greatest extent. Sir William Flower is living at Dunmore and looking after the Ormond interests in Kilkenny and neighbouring counties. In October, 1660, he writes to Lady Ormond that he has sent Mr. Harker and the mason and slater from Dunmore to do repairs at Cloghgranen. In September, 1663,

Lord Anglesey writes to Ormond describing Moor Park which has just been bought by Ormond—I know the place will please my lady Duchess well, though there be no such rooms as at Dunmore.

About this time Lady Ormond set about renovating on a large scale the mansion at Dunmore. In fact what follows would suggest the building of a new residence there. A very interesting letter written by John Morton, Lady Ormond's agent at Kilkenny, gives us some idea of the general structure of this new work. On December 20, 1665, he writes—May it please your Grace at Dunmore the great stairs at the upper end of the hall are put up, but the carvings about them not yet finished and the fretworks and wainscotings in her Grace's apartments are finished, and the masons have worked good part of the marble steps for the entrance into the house, and the frontispiece of pillars is ready to put up when the masons have paved the portico before the entrance, which is good part done, and the whole house is glazed, and the rooms plastered and doors made and the rooms locked up to preserve the glass from breaking."

In Carte's Life of James Duke of Ormond, the following story is told about this new activity of Lady Ormond. When she set about building Dunmore, intending to make it her residence, in case she should survive the Duke (for she said Kilkenny Castle ought always to belong to the head of the family); she laid out vast sums of money on that building. Cary Dillon walking with his Grace and others on the leads of that castle, from whence there is a fine view of the country about, and particularly of the house and park of Dunmore, made a pun upon that place, saying to the Duke of Ormonde: 'Your Grace has done much here (pointing to Kilkenny) but yonder you have Done more. Alas, Cary (replied the Duke) it is incredible what that has cost: but my wife has done so much to that house, that she has almost undone me."

In a letter of 1667 we get some idea of the work on the grounds attached to the mansion. In that year John Bryan writes to the Duchess—I have advised with both gardeners at Dunmore and Adam Seix about planting the acorns and ashkeys. They are all of opinion that a large nursery be made, out of which the plants may be

removed into any place or part that your Grace shall command it hereafter. And such a place for a nursery have I now ready, close and strong-fenced. And for planting acorns and ashkeys by the pale sides in the park where the deer can come at them, is thought to avail little. I have with both the gardeners viewed the grounds at Dunmore and (as we conceive) have pitched upon the most fit and convenient places for ornament and shelter . . . They are going about renewing what is decayed of the wilderness at Dunmore. I hope to furnish them with trees for that out of the Curragh.

In February, 1669, the Duke of Ormond was removed from office as Viceroy of Ireland, an office which he had held for several years. Hence he had to vacate the official residence and some of the furniture was removed to Dunmore, at least such as will take up most room, by reason that house is empty.

John Dunton saw Dunmore in 1698 when it was still in its splendour and thus describes the house—"I rambled to Dunmore, another seat of the Duke of Ormond's which is the finest house in Ireland. On some of the floors of this house I reckoned twentyfour rooms; the staircase that leads to them are hung with curious landscapes, and is so large that twenty men might walk abreast; had the house another branch it would be a perfect H; but without this additional beauty, perhaps it may boast of more rooms than are to be found in some whole towns."

In the 18th century several travellers give us their impressions, Dr. Thomas Molyneux, younger brother of the famous William Molyneux, made a journey to Kilkenny in 1709 of which he made some notes. Having viewed Kilkenny Castle, of which he formed a very poor opinion, he went to see Dunmore Park. "Tis a well sheltered Parke, with furs, good land, and well divided into pretty small paddocks; here is a good pheasantry kept, which stocks the whole country about; here was also formerly a handsome country house belonging to the Duke called Dunmore House, which is now pulled down and the furniture and pictures all carried to the Castle." If this is to be relied on it dates for us the time when the house was given up as a residence. Possibly also local gossip was strong that the house would be completely destroyed and hence the writer's reference to pulling down the house.

A *Tour Through Ireland*, by two English gentlemen, published in Dublin, 1748, mentions Dunmore as "a noble proportioned body falling to the grave with daily decay" and compares its avenues and rows of lofty trees to the walks from Petersham to Ham in Surrey, giving the preference to Dunmore, and adds "in short such a place, formed by nature for grandeur or pleasure, is not often found in England." Dr. John Wesley on his journeys through Ireland visited Dunmore in June, 1750 and admired the fourfold "walks" of ashes and the tufts of trees sprinkled up and down on the smoothest of green lawns. He described the Park as the most delightful place he had seen on his wanderings.

Dr. Pococke, the famous Irish traveller, who later became Protestant Bishop of Ossory, passed through Kilkenny in 1752 but only makes a passing reference—"The park of Kilkenny is on the Nore and much esteemed for the pleasantness of it; and beyond it are some remarkable caverns." Thus are the Caves of Dunmore and Dunmore Park summarily dismissed. Philip Luckombe visited here in 1779 but as he copies his comments on Dunmore almost word for word from *A Tour by Two Englishmen* already quoted, he adds nothing new. *Post-Chaise Companion* describes the ruins of the mansion as still standing 'near a large and fine plantation of trees, which extends two miles.' The ruins were removed and the trees cut down at the beginning of the 19th century.

There is an old tradition in the neighbourhood that when the Park was being reafforested the plantations were laid out to represent the battlefield of Waterloo and the disposition of the forces there. As a large number of trees were removed during the World War 1914-18, it would scarcely seem possible to verify this now. Dunmore Cottage now occupies the site of the former mansion.