

The Power of Kilfane Portraits

Among the most important benefactions to Rothe House in recent times has been the gift of four life-sized portraits of members of the Power family of Kilfane, presented by Count de la Poer, Gurteen le Poer, Kilsheelan, Co. Tipperary.

The portraits are :

1. *Sir John Power*, 1st Baronet, by J. P. Haverty, R.H.A.
2. *Richard Power*, his brother, in the role of Hamlet, by J. P. Haverty, R.H.A.
3. *Sir John Power*, 2nd Baronet, by Sir Francis Grant, R.A.

This portrait was commissioned by 500 friends and admirers of Sir John and presented to Lady Power, his wife, at the Royal Dublin Society on 15 April 1864. A contemporary account of that occasion describes the painting: "Sir John is represented in the characteristic dress of a hunting gentleman, leaning against a tree, his whip in one hand and his cap in the other, and at his feet three favourite hounds called Safety, Samson and Rantes. The painting is on the whole exceedingly fine, partaking of the nature of a picture as well as of a portrait. As a portrait alone, it is said to be most faithful, the artist having portrayed not only the lines, but also the spirit and expression of Sir John's face".

4. *Frances Power*, by Catterson Smith. (Three-quarters length).

She was the youngest daughter of the 1st Baronet and married, in 1840, John William Power, D.L., J.P., of Gurteen. Her son Edmund de la Poer was created a count of the Papal States and a Knight of Malta in 1864. Her great-grandson presented the paintings to Kilkenny Archaeological Society in 1984 for safe keeping.

The following is a brief account of that active and creative family:

In the year 1797 Mr. John Power of Tullaghmaine Castle, Co. Tipperary, brought a pack of fox-hounds to Co. Kilkenny at the behest of Sir Wheeler Cuffe of Lyrath. Settling at Derrynahinch, Ballyhale, he established, in conjunction with his brother Richard, the Kilkenny Hunt Club, the first of its kind in this island. They were both co-heirs of their uncle, Baron Power of the Court Exchequer in Ireland. Shortly after coming to Derrynahinch, John Power married Harriet Bushe of Kilfane. About 1800 he took a lease forever of Kilfane from his brother-in-law, Henry Amyas Bushe, and went to reside there. He was created Baronet in 1836 and died at Kilfane in 1844.

The palmiest period of the Kilkenny Hunt Club was probably between the years 1835 and 1850, when there were stabled in Kilkenny and surrounding district as many as 200 horses belonging to visitors. The headquarters of the Club was the former Rice's Hotel in Patrick Street, which became known as the Club House, a name which it has retained ever since. Up to comparatively recent times, the opening meet of Kilkenny Hunt started from the Club House.

Richard Power, who had a house in Kildare Street, Dublin lived on and off with his brother John at Kilfane. Though a good rider, he did not profess to be an enthusiastic fox hunter. He was a highly cultivated man who collected pictures and statuary, and was an excellent actor. To him is due the institution of the Private Theatre in Kilkenny which continued annually with a few interruptions from 1802 until 1819. During the season, it was

said, Kilkenny was rivalled only by Bath as a resort for marriageable girls seeking suitable partners. A local newspaper, rendered dizzy on one theatrical occasion, sighed: "In every row of the box circle appeared lovely women of the first rank and family, in all the brilliance of full dress, the pride and ornament of our county, and our country at large".

As the portrait of Richard Power shows him in the 'inky cloak' of Hamlet, it is interesting to note that he played that role during three separate seasons of the Kilkenny Theatre — on October 25th 1803, on October 18th 1809 and on September 29th 1818. On the second of these occasions, the after-piece was "Love Laughs at Locksmiths" in which Tom Moore was the star. "His songs were all encored and the House was uncommonly crowded" (Leinster Journal, 21 October 1809).

Richard Power outlived his creation by a very few years. He died of a lung disease in 1824, and was buried in Kilfane Church at daybreak on a winter's morning. The biographer of Henry Flood wrote in 1834: "The theatre is now a mart of miscellaneous furniture without a vestige to remind the observer of the famed amateurs of sock and buskin".

Of the later Kilfane Powers, Sir John, 2nd Baronet (died 1873) was succeeded by his son Richard Crampton as 3rd Baronet. He died in 1892 at the age of 49 years, and was succeeded by his two sons, who both died tragically in the South African War — John Elliott, the 4th Baronet, in June 1900, and Derrick Elliott, the 5th Baronet in January 1902. He also had two daughters, the elder, May Wilmot Beatrice, continued living in Kilfane until her death in 1966 at the age of ninety. Shortly afterwards the house was sold and the connection with the Power family ended.

EDITOR.