

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **A Tour of Tullynally**

Tullynally Castle is an impressive Gothic Revival Style castle located some two kilometers from the pretty village of Castlepollard on the Coole village road in County Westmeath, Ireland. Tullynally (the name, literally translated, means "Hill of the Swans") has been home to the same family (ten generations) for over three and one-half centuries, and over the years the structure of the house has undergone great alterations. The embellishments made in the 1860s were enough to see the home allocated the position as the largest occupied castellated country house in all of Ireland.

Tullynally is a dream house for the bibliophile, with almost every room overflowing with books (6,000 volumes spanning four centuries). Displayed prominently above the black marble mantelpiece in the great library hangs a portrait of one of Tullynally's former occupants. Decked out in bright red and full military regalia, this young officer (having been promoted in 1814 to the rank of major-general to become commander of the British North American army after his predecessor was killed by a sniper) was himself cut down in battle at the young age of 36. The portrait is of Sir Edward Michael Pakenham GCB, the British commander so soundly defeated by Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815.

Grapeshot from the American artillery shattered Pakenham's knee and killed his horse. Helped to his feet, he was shot a second time in the arm. After mounting his aide-de-camp's horse, additional grapeshot fatally ripped through his spine, and he died as he was carried off the Chalmette battlefield. Pakenham was known during his lifetime for his surly temper and when his body was returned to Ireland in a cask of rum, a relative was recorded as remarking, "The General has returned home in better spirits than he left."

Edward Pakenham (known as Ned) had a sister, Catherine (known as Kitty), who in 1806 married Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington. Ned was one of the young men with ability that the "Iron Duke" had picked for his staff. Pakenham's family had purchased his

commission as a lieutenant in the 92nd Foot Regiment when he was only sixteen. A very capable leader, he commanded a battalion of Royal Fusiliers at the tender age of 19. Victory was achieved against the French at Martinique, where Pakenham was among the wounded. According to the Fusiliers' history, "He was to be wounded again three times in the Peninsular War before he fell at the head of the brigade, which included his old battalion, at the disastrous attack on New Orleans."

One of the most beloved British poet Laureates, John Betjeman, who stayed at Tullynally in 1939, considered it "an early nineteenth century Gothic palace". Architectural historian Mark Bence-Jones described this ancestral home once known as Pakenham Hall as a "long, picturesque skyline of towers, turrets, battlements, and gateways stretching among the trees of its rolling park." "Tullynally," he went on to say, "covers a greater area than any other country house in Ireland," and looks "not so much like a castle as a small fortified town; a Camelot of the Gothic Revival."

Between 1801 and 1806, the once Georgian home was transformed into a faux-castle by pre-eminent Irish architect Francis Johnston. The gray-stone structure is so long, with its 600 feet of battlements and numerous towers, that it looks like a miniature town from a distance.

Originally from Suffolk, the first member of the Pakenham family to settle in Ireland was Captain Henry Pakenham, who in 1655 accepted grants of land in Counties Westmeath and Wexford in lieu of arrears of pay. In 1739, Thomas Pakenham married Elizabeth Cuffe, niece and heiress of the first and second Earl of Longford. With that, the Pakenham family became the Earls of Longford. Current owners, historian Thomas Pakenham, 8th Earl of Longford, and his wife Valerie have created beautiful new gardens with plants brought back from trips to China and Tibet.

Early generations of Pakenhams were military men, and Tullynally's great entrance hall displays numerous swords along the wall. Brigadier-general Thomas Pakenham, 5th Earl of Longford, fell as he led his brigade at Gallipoli in 1915. His last words were, reputedly "Don't bother ducking, the men don't like it and it doesn't do any good." But it appears that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword. Thomas' son Edward, 6th Earl of Longford, wrote plays and poetry. He and his wife Christine supported Dublin's Gate Theatre from 1930 onward and founded the Longford Players. His brother Frank succeeded him as seventh Earl and married the beautiful Elizabeth Harman, who *The New York Times* described as "able, articulate and beautiful", as well as having "undergraduates and even dons tumbling over one another to fall in love with her." She is noted for her prize-winning biography of Queen Victoria, as well as numerous other works. Lady Longford and Frank had eight children, among them the writers

Lady Antonia Fraser, Lady Rachel Billington, poet Judith Kazantzis and Thomas Pakenham. Eighth Earl Thomas (born 1933) is a prize-winning Irish historian and arborist, who has written on Victorian and post-Victorian British history, as well as trees. He is the author of *Meetings with Remarkable Trees* (1996). Thomas' wife Valerie has written several books, as well, and their daughter Lady Eliza Pakenham recently published a history of the family in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century. They have three other children.

Lady Antonia Fraser, famous for her biography of Mary Queen of Scots, was born Antonia Margaret Caroline Pakenham in 1932. She is also a novelist and writer of detective fiction, who from 1956 until their divorce was married to Sir Hugh Fraser (1918-1984), a Conservative Unionist MP in the House of Commons who was a friend of the Kennedy family. She is today the widow of Harold Pinter (1930-2008), the 2005 Nobel Laureate in Literature. Divorcing Sir Hugh and marrying Harold Pinter caused quite a scandal at the time.

In 1975, Caroline Kennedy was visiting London to complete an art course at Sotheby's auction house. She was staying with the Fraser family, and she and her host were the intended targets of an IRA car bomb on October 23, 1975. The bomb, fitted to Sir Hugh's car outside the Fraser house at Campden Hill Square, London, SW8, exploded shortly before Kennedy and Fraser were due to leave for their daily drive to Sotheby's. Caroline was running late and had not yet left the house. But a neighbor, well-respected cancer researcher Gordon Hamilton-Fairley, was killed. While walking his white poodle, he saw something (or suspected something) under the vehicle, leaned against the car to investigate, and the car exploded. Jean, the Fraser's *au pair*, witnessed the horrible scene.

Antonia Fraser wrote of the assassin, "He had gone for Hugh, it was said later, as a hard-line Tory over Northern Ireland - which wasn't even true: as a Catholic himself, Hugh had a lot of sympathy for the plight of the Catholics over there."

Major-General Sir Edward Pakenham is remembered today by a small village in Ontario, Canada, named in his honor for a short visit he made there. There is also a statue of him at the South Transept of St Paul's Cathedral in London. And in Louisiana there is a magnificent alley of moss-festooned live oaks known as the Pakenham Oaks. They are also known as the de la Ronde Oaks because they were planted by Pierre Denis de la Ronde in 1783 on his twenty-first birthday. The de la Ronde plantation house was built in 1805 and used as headquarters and a hospital by the British under Pakenham's command during the Battle of New Orleans. Over the years, it was said that Pakenham had fallen beneath these majestic trees. He didn't. An avenue of pecan trees was planted in the rear of the mansion site, but it has long since disappeared.

It is fitting that the current Earl of Longford, Thomas Pakenham, is an historian and arborist. The trees of Chalmette and those of Tullynally have seen much over the years.

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