

Glenville - other days, other ways

Sometime ago, my attention was directed to a book about Glenville, off the Dunmore Road, entitled "Walled Gardens"- scenes from an Anglo-Irish childhood, by Annabel Davis-Goff. The book proved a delightful and insightful read giving a glimpse into a world and way of life that has almost disappeared as the Anglo-Irish, in decline from a previously dominant role in society in Ireland struggled, often in penury in keeping up appearances and punctilious good behaviours -so brilliantly described elsewhere by Molly Keane, in whose honour, by the way, a literary festival was held in her native Ardmore a few weekends ago.

Annabel was born at Glenville (where Snowcream was located since the mid-fifties until recently) and the extensive walled gardens of the title extended back along the banks of the river to include what is now Glenville housing estate. Indeed, part of the Glanbia lands here were the subject of a major planning application recently. Her father Sir Ernest Goff, was born at another nearby Big House- Maypark. His original family home was at Goretown, Co Wexford. She also tells of the De Bromheads their neighbours in nearby Ardkeen House. She especially remembers Johnny De Bromhead with affection with something approaching awe when they played together as children. As she put it herself: "He established himself as an early member of my hall of heroes- prompted in no small way by his ability to 'put away' a whole plate of chocolate biscuits with no consequent ill effects".

Of Wuthering Heights

Annabel Davis-Goff speaks with fond recollections of the O'Shea family, who were gardeners and lived in a cottage on the grounds and always welcomed her warmly to their kitchen and chatted with an informality not always possible with her own parents- she says of them that they had the kind of good manners that are based on impeccable instincts, which she observes are more often found in the native-born Irish than the Anglo-Irish. The haunting memories take the reader to a succession of country houses in which she, her parents and grandparents lived. Of Ballinacourty, she says that it was a combination of beauty, taste, squalor and discomfort, where the kitchen makes her think of Wuthering Heights. These houses with their walled gardens, magical landscapes and their air of faded grandeur, were the homes of the Ascendancy in their twilight years when a groom and two horses were still irreducible necessities of life and where unpaid bills grew by the month.

A New Ireland

It is further noteworthy that in her comments about the O'Shea family she remarks that one of their sons went on to be a professor at a Canadian University while only one of her family completed second level education and none went to university. This irony she says illustrates how their whole world went topsy-turvy in the new Ireland for which they were totally inadequately prepared.

Incidentally, it was her great grandfather, William Davis Goff who owned and drove the first car in Waterford - WI 1. So he had the honour of being the first car on the Dunmore Road- look at what he started! This book was most enjoyable and Glenville will never again be just a word but something redolent of much, much more. Some weeks ago I brought you the story of the tobacco plant/station here which was developed on the lands here at Glenville which had been acquired from the Geoff estate and developed as Powers seeds which continues into its forth generation as SeedTech over on the other side of the river at Ballymountain.

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Sailing Away

A whole ocean of words have already and will continue to be used to describe Waterford's Festival of Sail- it was truly glorious, tears were shed and hearts were bursting with pride, taking a bow everyone because everybody played their part, great or small, all adding up to a whopping success for Waterford.