

PLACES

Camelot — and baby came too



Castle Leslie, surrounded by ancient woodlands, transports you to another world, another time

MONAGHAN

Barry Egan

Patrick Kavanagh, who hailed from these parts, from Inniskeen, called it in his poem *Having To Live In The Country*, “wild, wet Monaghan.” When we went recently, it never rained once. Nor was it particularly wild. I felt, imperceptibly, robbed by Mother Nature. The sun shone almost non-stop.

The last time I was in Monaghan town was a very long time ago with Hothouse Flowers, back in 1988: we travelled up and down to their gig in a hall in the town in the band’s rickety tour van. Nearly three decades later, we’ve gone into a bar on Dublin Street in Monaghan Town for a bit of lunch and they are playing Hothouse Flowers. Later, walking around the town, my wife and me, and the baby in her buggy, took in the architectural intrigues of the place: to name but a few, the Victorian courthouse built in 1830 on Church Square; the Gothic-Revival St Macartan’s Cathedral built 1861-92 and, erected in 1876, the Rossmore Memorial in The Diamond was designed to remember the fourth Baron Rossmore. According to Burke’s Peerage, ‘he died on 28 March 1874 at age 22 at Windsor, Berkshire, England, as a result of a fall when riding in the Guards’ Cup steeplechase, unmarried.’ The octagonal Victorian monument has the eight letters of the man which it was designed in homage to spread across the columns. It is like something out of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Earlier that morning, we were back to innate Monaghan beauty

straight out of a Kavanagh poem. I’d love to know what our one year old baby thought of Dartrey Forest, Rockcorry, with its magic coming out of every tree along the paths — or the ineffable energy that perhaps only Baby could see with her new eyes of the Famine Wall from Cotehill to Rockcorry.

My little angel Emilia was mesmerised by the transcendent colour of the spring leaves and the like, as I pushed her in her buggy. Ireland has the most beautiful scenery in the world when you think about it, doesn’t it?

We were only on a short break, but we were told that the forest walks in Lough Muckno Leisure Park, in Castleblayney, could be just as mesmerising to babies of all ages and we made a mental note: must come back soon. We hadn’t much time. We were bound for Glaslough and a famous fairytale castle. . .

Castle Leslie is probably more Downton Abbey than *Downton Abbey*. As far back as the 1740s. Dean Swift wrote: ‘Here I am in Castle Leslie, With rows and rows of books upon the shelves/Written by The Leslies, All about themselves.’

Paul McCartney got married here in 2002 — he and your wan Heather Mills were rowed across the lake to their fate. So I simply had to take my wife and baby out for an afternoon row on the mystical lake. It was as clear as glass as it was otherworldly. It cleared my head.

When you are there and you look around at all this scenery that surrounds you — the ancient woodlands, the Irish countryside at its most sublime and spiritual — you are transported to another world, another time.

Out here, you forget about your troubles or whatever is on your mind and just go with the wind on the

‘It was bliss. For three days we reconnected with something deeper inside ourselves in this most glamorous of getaways’

water on the lake and the sounds of the birds in the distant trees.

There is no other hotel like Castle Leslie in Ireland. There is no swimming pool. There are no TVs in the rooms. And the mobile phone and the internet coverage is god-awful.

And you know what? It was bliss! For three days we reconnected with something deeper inside ourselves in this most glamorous of getaways. Rather than be glued to the telly or Netflix or checking our Facebook or Twitter, we did the most perverse things instead. . .

We talked to each-other over teas and scones and posh sandwiches in the hotel’s rather imposing drawing room. We went for walks in the spooky-cool woodlands. We sat on the benches and held hands, like teenagers in love. We drank wine and read esoteric books from the Castle’s shelves while the baby crawled around.

The mini nervous breakdown I was having on the first day — because my mobile phone had no coverage — was almost gone by the second evening once I accepted that we were marvellously and magnificently and almost completely cut off from the outside world. (Actually, it

was a five-minute walk to the town!)

It was a fascinating exercise in letting go. The baby was fascinated, too, by the standing antique bath in the corner of our room, and loved having her bath-time in such a big and strange looking thing.

We then all had a pre-dinner drink (the baby had a pre-dinner bottle) in the opulent drawing room with its grand piano and with its De La Robbia fireplace complete with a fire roaring inside it.

At the appointed hour, a driver came and picked us up and brought us the 400 metres to the hotel’s exquisite Snaffles Restaurant. We had a beautiful meal of local meats and fish, followed by sumptuous desserts, all washed down with a glass or two of good wine.

I won’t bore you with what the baby had. The following morning, Emilia in her jammies was in thrall to the sight of a 99-year-old man in his bedtime attire — albeit a distinctly regal looking silk pyjamas — and slippers, having his breakfast at an adjoining table in the hotel’s dining area.

Allow me to introduce you to Sir John Leslie, 4th Baronet, a first cousin once removed of Sir Winston Churchill. . .

The last time I met Uncle Jack, as they call him, he took me and a gang clubbing and told me the story of Norman Leslie who was spotted in a cloud of light by Lady Marjorie Leslie in 1914, not long after he had been killed on the battlefields of France.

Lady Marjorie immediately sat bolt upright in bed and enquired thus through the cloud of dust: “Why Norman! What are you doing here?”

Doubtless my one-year-old daughter was thinking: “Why Uncle Jack! What are you doing here in your silk jammies?”

GETTING THERE

OVERNIGHT ESCAPE

One night’s accommodation, a full Irish breakfast and a 5 course dinner in Snaffles Restaurant. From €135pps at The Lodge From €145pps at The Castle

COUNTRY GETAWAY

Two nights accommodation plus five-course dinner in Snaffles Restaurant. From €215pps at The Lodge From €225pps at The Castle

EASTER FAMILY BREAKS

Three or five nights at the Old Stable Mews or Village Cottages to include breakfast each morning in Snaffles Restaurant and a casual three-course family dinner at Conor’s Bar at The Lodge on a night of your choice. From €700 for 3 Nights From €900 for 5 Nights

To make a booking, please contact the Reservations Team on 04788100 or email reservations@castleleslie.com Web: www.castleleslie.com

Castle Leslie Estate
Glaslough
Monaghan
www.castleleslie.com



Sir John Leslie with his uncle Norman Leslie’s sword. Norman Leslie was shot and killed while charging a German machine-gun post in October 1914