

The Crimean War

James Thomas Burke of St. Clerans also joined the military, serving as an officer with the Royal Engineers. James was a skillful engineer and has been described as a high-spirited and daring soldier, brave even to a fault. When the Crimean War broke out in 1854, he accompanied Sir John Burgoyne to the Crimea. He first assisted Omar Pasha in making arrangements for the defense of Silistria against the Russians, and then volunteered for service with the Sultan. James was killed at the battle of Giurgevo, on the Danube, on July 7th 1854, shortly after hostilities broke out. He was the first British officer to be killed in the Crimean War. James's death has been recorded:-

When he first leaped on shore from the boat, six soldiers charged him. Two he shot with his revolver, one he cut down with his sword, the rest turned and fled. A number of riflemen advanced from behind a ditch and took deliberate aim at him. He charged them with headlong gallantry, and, as he got near, was struck by a ball, which broke his jawbone; but he rushed on, shot three men dead at close quarters, and cleft two others, through helmet and all into the brain, with his sword. He was then surrounded, and while engaged in cutting his way with heroic courage through the ranks of the enemy, a sabre-cut from behind nearly severed his head from his body, and he fell dead, covered with wounds, of which thirty-three, consisting of sabre-gashes, lance and bayonet thrusts, blows from the butts of muskets, and bullet-holes, were afterwards found on his body. (O'Brien, M. 1991, p.174).

James was posthumously awarded the Turkish Order of Medjidie (gold) for gallantry. James was buried at Rustchuk on the Bulgarian, then Turkish, bank of the Danube, near the Cathedral. The cross over his grave carries the following inscription:- 'Sacred to the memory of Lieut. James T. Burke, Royal Engineers. Killed in action at Giurgevo, 7th July 1854.'

John Hardiman Burke, the eldest of the Burke brothers, was a Colonel in 88th Connaught Rangers, one of the great assault regiments within the British Army of that period. He served in the Mediterranean, Nova Scotia and the West Indies. During the Crimean War, 1854-1856, he saw action at three of the main battles, Alma, Balaklava and Inkerman. The Battle of Inkerman was one of the main engagements of the Crimean War. Inkerman is a village and seaport in the Crimea, lying thirty-five miles south-west of Simpheropol. The name is Turkish, meaning cavern fortress. Just before dawn on Sunday, November 5th 1854, 35,000 Russian soldiers advanced through a thick mist, against the allied forces of Britain and France, who had occupied the heights



10. John Hardiman Burke
(circa 1858, Courtesy, the Viscountess Selby)

of Inkerman. Another 22,000 Russians lay in support of their advancing army. Similar to the Battle at Waterloo, which was also fought on a Sunday, it had rained almost incessantly the night before the battle. None of the allied forces had suspected that the Russian troops were so close to their position. Inkerman was defended by only 14,000 allied troops. The Russians used the cover of darkness to advance up the valley and by dawn they were ready for the assault on the weaker allied positions. Another advantage in favour of the Russians, was the fog, as it rendered their grey military coats almost invisible.

Shortly after dawn the Russian attack began, the allied picket lines were obliged to retreat and fall back to their main body. The Russian columns continued to push forward and before long, musket discharges were taking place at ten to fifteen paces, gradually the conflict became a bloody hand to hand affair. One of the allied regiments defending the heights of Inkerman was Burke's, 88th Connaught Rangers. The allies fought off the continuous attack all that morning. At about one o'clock in the afternoon, the Russians made a final futile assault on the heights. This attack was also repulsed by incessant musket fire into the Russian columns, thinning them out and forcing them back down the valley. Finally after eight and a half hours of sanguinary battle, the Russians were forced to withdraw, they had sustained about 12,000 casualties, the allies had lost 4331 men. The *Illustrated London News* described the battle as: '...eight hours and a half of the hardest fighting ever witnessed on any battle field.' Among the artillery pieces left behind on the battle-field by the fleeing Russians, were two 36 pdr. cannons, which are now part of the park furniture at Eyre Square, in Galway City. After the war, both cannons were presented to the town of Galway, by the British War Department, to honour the service of the Connaught Rangers. John Burke also took part in the siege of Sebastopol, serving on the staff of Lieutenant General Sir John Burgoyne.

After the war ended in 1856, John Burke returned to St. Clerans, accompanied by a friend and fellow officer, Major Francis Horatio de Vere. By this time, St. Clerans was again in financial difficulties and John set about trying to settle the debts. Like his father, John loved St. Clerans, and could be seen at dusk walking the grounds. Although he survived the conflict, John died in August 1863, in London, from an illness he had contracted during the war. He was the last in the male line of the Burke family to own St. Clerans, and was also the 24th or 25th in descent from William de Burgo, who had arrived in Connacht nearly seven hundred years earlier. John Burke never married, but at eighteen years he did fall in love with Miss Emily Anne Martin, daughter of Mr. James Martin of Ross, and aunt of Violet Martin (pen name Martin Ross), who collaborated with Edith Somerville in writing books depicting the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Their Irish R.M. stories have been successfully televised. John's mother had opposed the marriage and the relationship ended.

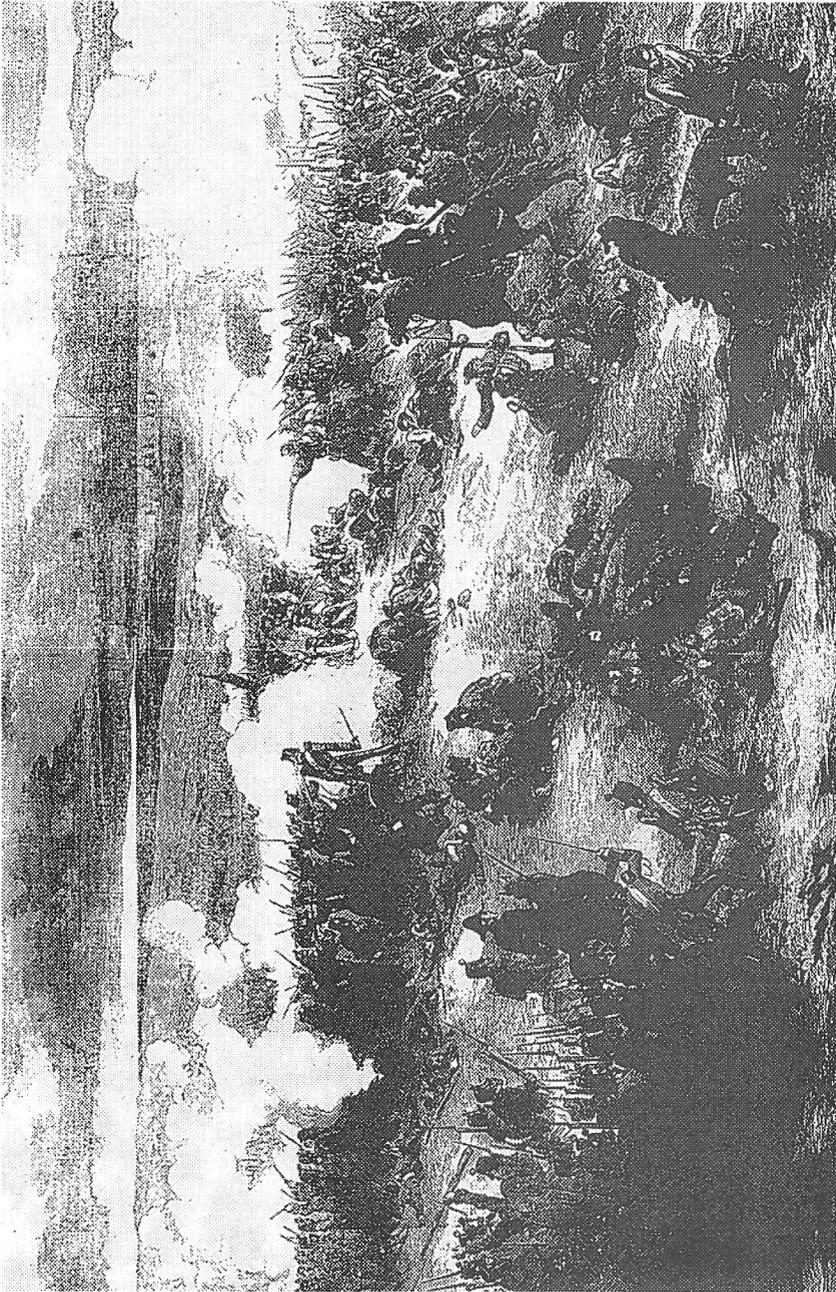
Love Story

Anne Celestine Burke was born at St. Clerans in 1837. According to those who knew her, Anne was a very fine looking lady, with a most pleasing countenance. She was elegant and slight of build, with light brown hair framing her porcelain complexion. She had delicate features with smiling blue eyes, which extended a radiance to all who crossed her path. She was a very determined and independent young woman, having lost her mother at the tender age of seven. Anne had a great love for music, and was taught by a travelling music master, Mr. May, who paid periodical visits to St. Clerans. However much of her talent for music, she developed herself. In later years, her daughter Eileen said of her:-

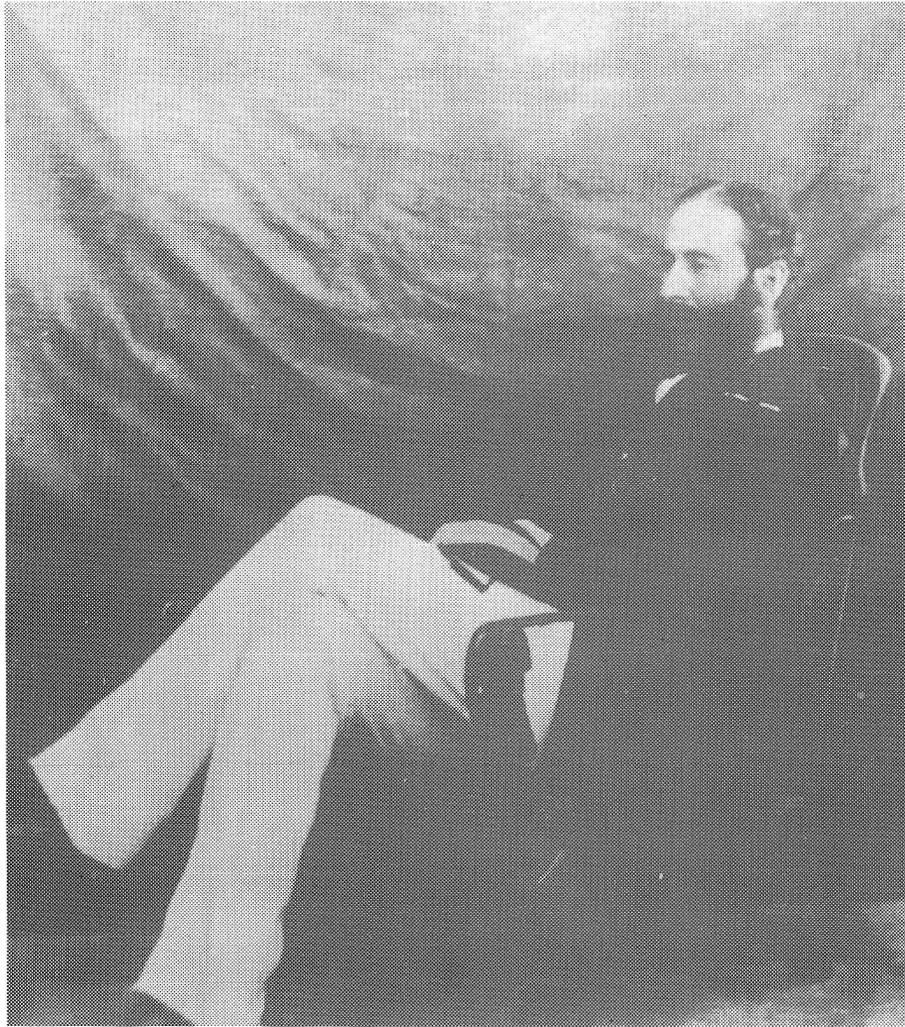
Mother's voice was soft and low and she sang all the dear old songs that we all love better than any others ...her musical taste and knowledge is purer and truer and broader in knowledge and sympathy than anyone's I have ever met.

Anne went to her first ball when she was sixteen with Lady Cloncurry, the hosts being Lord and Lady Drogheda. Anne was a great friend of Lord Cloncurry, who had married a relative of the Burkes of St. Clerans. Robert O'Hara Burke, named a river after Cloncurry, during his epic crossing of the Australian continent. A town of the same name is situated there today. Anne attracted attention where ever she went. Once while attending a play at a Dublin theatre with Lady Cloncurry, the audience started to cheer for the lovely young lady in the front row who was pulling on her gloves; obviously a number of young gentlemen were observing her movements. She was an accomplished equestrienne and even after her fathers death, her brother John always kept a horse for her. Like her brother Robert, Anne was also a good swimmer. One summer while staying in Galway she rode her mare to Sea Road, there she left the mare in the charge of a local boy while she went for a swim. A short time later, a gentleman friend of her sister's happened to pass, admiring the mare he inquired as to the identity of the owner:- 'Miss Burke of St. Clerans' the youth answered, 'And where is she?' asked the gentleman. 'Look beyond' answered the boy, pointing to a speck in Galway Bay. Another friend afterwards declared:- 'She was half way to the Burren.'

One Summers day in 1856, when Anne was nineteen years old, she met her first love, Major Horace de Vere. Anne and her sister Hester were out enjoying the sunshine in one of the fields, close to the manor house at St.



11. Battle of Inkerman
(Crimean War 1854-56, Courtesy, the Illustrated London News)



12. Major Horace de Vere
(circa 1864, Courtesy, the Viscountess Selby)

Clerans. The ladies saw two men dressed in officers uniform walking towards them from the direction of the house. As the soldiers approached, Anne recognized one of them as her brother, Major John Burke. The other officer was a stranger to her, but she was then introduced to him, he was Major Francis Horatio de Vere. The two officers had just returned from service in the Crimean War, where they had become good friends. Major de Vere was from County Limerick, his family had been in Ireland since Cromwellian times. His father was Aubrey de Vere, the famous poet. During that Summer, Major de Vere and Anne spent much of their time together, romance blossomed immediately. By the time his visit to St. Clerans came to an end, the Burke family had grown very fond of Major de Vere. The young couple were by this time very much in love, and when Major de Vere was asked by the Burke family to stay on a while longer. He agreed; but only on the condition that he would have Anne's hand in marriage. His request was granted, and the couple were married on November 4th 1856.

After the wedding, the young lovers left St. Clerans and moved first to London, where they lived at 1, Eaton Place South. In London, Anne sadly lost her first two children, a baby boy and girl. However a third baby was born, Mary de Vere. By this time, Anne was missing the great freedom she had at St. Clerans, the horse riding and her visits to Galway City. Although she made many friends in London, Anne was totally unaccustomed to city life, so much so, that her health began to suffer. After three years living in London, Major de Vere was transferred to Corfu and his family moved also. Their second daughter Eileen was born in Corfu. Two years later, the British handed Corfu over to Greece. Anne remembered the day well, she witnessed the destruction of the fortifications, and the lowering of the British Flag. Holding her baby daughter in her arms, and little Mary by her hand, Anne was greatly saddened as she watched the proceedings from the deck of a British ship, after which, the family sailed for England.

Their third daughter, Margaret, was born when they returned to London. One year after returning from Corfu, a disgruntled private soldier, whom Major de Vere had disciplined, shot and fatally wounded the Major, at Chatham barracks in August 1865. By this time Anne had lost almost all of her nearest and dearest: Her parents, her three brothers, John, Robert and James, two of her babies and now her husband, Horace. She decided it was time to take the children home to St. Clerans. Her sister Hester Albinia who was not married, had inherited St. Clerans, after John died. The children's first memories of their Aunt Hester, was of an invalid, being drawn around the walks at St. Clerans, in a little donkey carriage. Hester was by now so ill, that Anne decided to take her to Madeira, in the hope of prolonging her life. Alas poor Hester died in Madeira, on November 10th 1866, Anne had her buried in a little cemetery there. Before returning to St. Clerans, Anne had a

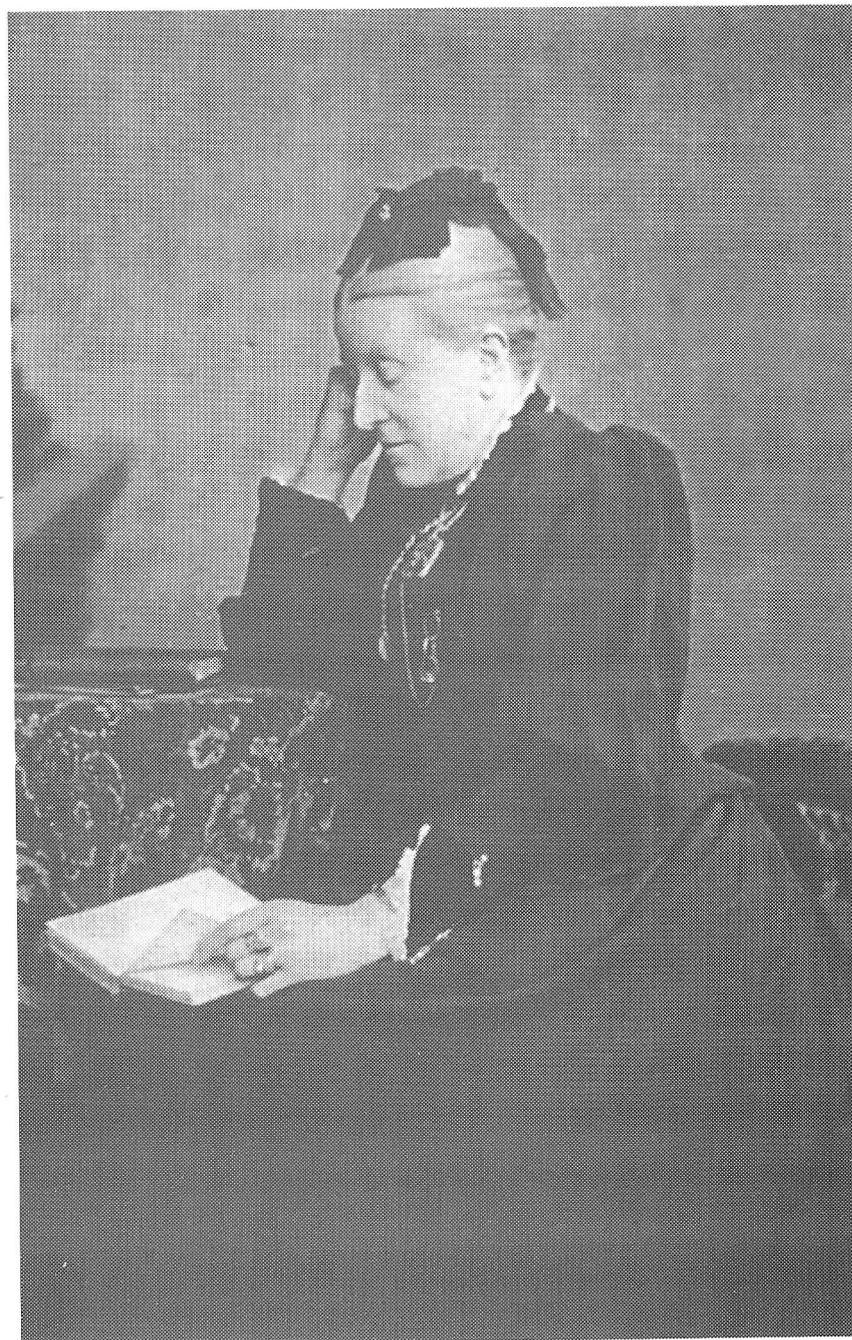
white marble cross erected and planted the grave with white violets.

Anne inherited the estate upon the death of Hester. St. Clerans was now a place of great solitude and silence. Looking back on that period at St. Clerans, it must have been a time of great loneliness for Anne. Although she was devoted to her three children, there was no one to share intimate moments, troubles or worries with. She read a great deal and rode her horse around the grounds of her ancestors, all now, just distant memories. In the evenings she would sing to her children. As time went by, there was a constant flow of visitors to St. Clerans. The frequent visitors included: Lady Cloncurry, the author Emily Lawless, Lady Gregory, who often stayed at St. Clerans, and Anne's brother-in-law, Aubrey de Vere, the poet. One of the most valued and loved people who worked at St. Clerans, during this period, was Morgan Fahey. A most loyal and beloved friend of the family, he had started work at St. Clerans as a stable boy, and eventually became the coachman. He taught the children the sport of horse-jumping, by running along with the horse and leaping over the walls. The children loved him and even today the family remember him with fondness. Anne would take her daughter Mary riding in the mornings. Mary had cherished memories of her time spent at St. Clerans, she wrote the following words, while still a child:-

Gaily I sprang to the back of my horse
And gaily we gallop thro' fields sweet with gorse
Only six o'clock yet! How we startled the sheep
The world's better and sweeter when still half asleep.

As far as the children were concerned they lived very happy quiet lives at St. Clerans. They later remembered with fondness the turf fires burning, the warm nurseries and the blue willow-patterned china. Going to the stables to visit an old Arab horse called Peter, another old horse called Bob, taking Brush, their cocker spaniel for walks. At this time, these were the only animals kept at St. Clerans.

The financial situation at St. Clerans had become gradually worse over the years. Although John Burke did all he could to alleviate the situation before he died, there was still a mortgage of over £22,500 and debts of £2,500, to be paid. Anne conducted all her business, accounts, writing letters etc., in the back drawing room. It was a room which contained many books, covering a diversity of subjects, including a series on natural history. The children were perfectly happy to sit quietly in the room, looking through the many interesting books on wildlife, while their mother looked after the family business. Many years later, Eileen recalled seeing her mother cry silently as she pondered over the accounts, but Eileen only witnessed this once. Anne never troubled anyone with her problems, just worked hard at trying to sort them out.



13. Anne Celestine Burke
(circa 1910, Courtesy, Francis Chamberlain)

Anne would often visit her older sister Fanny, who had married John Blakeney on August 5th 1869. One of Fanny's children, a little boy, died a few days after his birth. He was buried under a Yew tree at the end of Robin's Walk at St. Clerans. The grave was marked by a small headstone. Fanny had five other children, and lived fourteen miles away at Abbert. All of Fanny's children died childless. Eileen also remembered when she was about five, her Mother and herself being driven home by Morgan in the horse and car. It was a beautiful starlit Christmas Eve and they were returning from their aunt Fanny. When they reached St. Clerans, they had tea and potato cakes sitting in front of the black drawing room fire, and the tea was served from a little blue Wedgewood teapot.

Anne's other sister, Elizabeth, married Lieutenant Colonel. W.C. Menzies, they had four sons: Charles, who died at St. Clerans when he was just six years old, James and William, both of whom became military men and died comparatively young, and George, about whom very little is known.

In 1873, Anne married again, this time to her cousin, the Rev. Charlton Maxwell, of Birdstown, Co. Donegal. The couple lived at St. Clerans. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Ireland was going through tough times, and for the poor unfortunate tenant farmers, evictions were widespread. It was a time when many landlords required the services of the military for protection. It seems however, that St. Clerans never needed such protection during these troubled times. Charlton Maxwell was a kind man much loved by his step children. He was a great fisherman and fished for salmon and trout all the way down the Dunkellin River from St. Clerans to Craughwell. Because of the large debt, Anne sold the entire St. Clerans estate to the Land Commission, in 1903. The sale enabled her to buy back St. Clerans and some of the adjoining land. Anne's courage and tenacity were exemplary, overcoming adversity and great personal tragedy. She died in December 1914, in Dublin, and was buried at Fahan, Co. Donegal. After Anne's death, her daughter Mary de Vere inherited St. Clerans.

The Practical Joker

Anne Celestine Burke's eldest daughter, Mary de Vere married Major William Utting Cole on 18th December 1879. The marriage produced two sons and a daughter, William Horace de Vere Cole, Lieutenant Colonel John James Burke Cole, and Anne Vere Cole. William Horace was normally called Horace by all who knew him, and he became very famous for playing practical jokes. He was educated at Eton. His flare for practical jokes began shortly after finishing his education. He returned to Eton, disguised as an Anglican Bishop, and confirmed several of the boys there, much to the amusement of his friends. It seems that once he had a disagreement with the artist, Augustus John, over the style of painting he produced. He annoyed Augustus John by sitting on a public pavement with one of the artist paintings placed in front of him. He then presented the artist with the paltry few pence which had been thrown to him, for Horace, it was an equitable reflection of the artists worth. On another occasion, he approached a complete stranger on a London street, and asked him to hold the end of a long piece of string for surveying purposes. Having told the stranger to hold his end of the string tight, he walked away pulling the rest of the string with him. Turning a corner at the end of the street, he asked another stranger to hold the other end of the string, giving him the same explanation. He then walked away leaving both strangers, unknown to each other, baffled at their posts.

Horace once held a party and invited a large number of people quite unknown to each other. They did however share the same surname, ending in Bottom, which caused some confusion. Horace was often mistaken for the Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, to whom he bore a rather strong resemblance. When someone recognised him as MacDonald, he would happily play along, inciting the crowd into a frenzy, preaching against the evils of socialism. Many of his friends were equally capable of playing practical jokes, and willingly conspired in some of his escapades. Horace de Vere Cole's closest friends included: Duncan Grant, Guy Ridley, Anthony Buxton, Adrian Stephen, and the most daring of them all, Adrian's sister, Virginia. She later became the novelist and critic Virginia Woolf. They once disguised themselves as a group of road-workers, and began road works at Piccadilly, London. After a number of hours they disappeared, leaving a huge hole in the road just for the sheer fun of it all. On another occasion, the group of pranksters, knowing that the Sultan of Zanzibar and a number of



14. Major William Utting Cole
(circa 1899, Courtesy, Francis Chamberlain)



15. Horace de Vere Cole
(at Eton circa 1900, Courtesy, Francis Chamberlain)

princes were visiting England, decided to visit the City of Cambridge, disguised as the group of princes. There they received a royal reception, and accepted all the honours bestowed upon them.

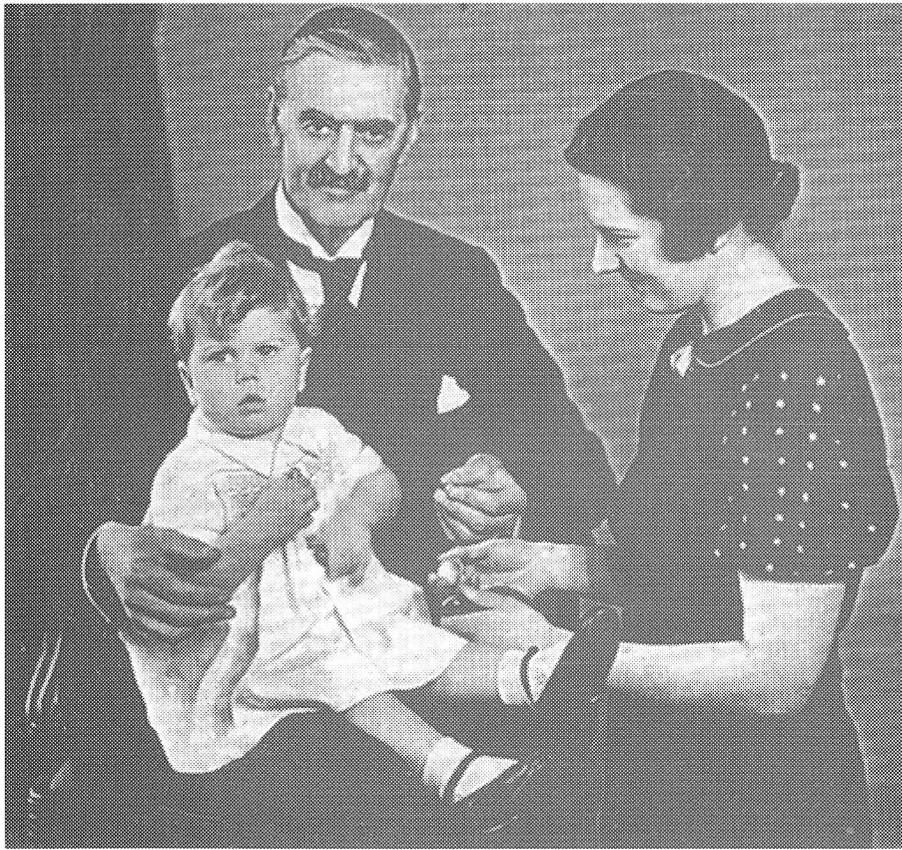
One of the most amazing practical jokes ever played on the British Royal Navy and its top ranking officers, is now known as the *Dreadnought Incident*. In February 1910, disguised as Abyssinian Princes, Horace and his friends managed to gain an invitation to visit the British Warship, *H M S Dreadnought*, for a grand tour of the ship. Upon boarding the ship they were met by the Admiral and a Guard-of-Honour of the Royal Marines. The group of princes led by their Emperor (Horace), were treated with all the respect and formality a royal visit would perpetuate. They were shown everything of importance on the ship. Asking a number of silly questions through their own 'interpreter', who was also part of the hoax, they answered to everything 'Bunga Bunga', which was translated to the Royal Navy representatives, as meaning, 'Isn't that lovely'. The Admiral heaved a sigh of relief when the tour ended and the royal visitors turned down his offer to dine on board the ship. He was very pleased that his royal guests had enjoyed themselves, and that the tour had been one of the highlights of their visit. However two days later he was horrified, when it became known that it had all been a hoax. After the fraud was discovered, the Royal Navy considered taking legal action against Horace de Vere Cole and his friends. However after careful consideration, it was decided not to press charges against Cole, as it would only draw more attention to the incident. It could be viewed as a major security risk, and the Navy did not need this negative publicity. The Daily Express had already carried the story, and by now the Navy were of the opinion, that the least said about the incident the better. The jokers had got away with it, although poor Duncan Grant was later accosted and taken away by a group of sailors, and for his part in the hoax, he received a ceremonial birching. Much of their success was due to the excellent make-up of London based cosmetic man, William Clarkson. He also designed and fitted their costumes. Virginia Woolf later delivered a lecture on the *Dreadnought Incident*. Virginia Stephen was born in 1882. In 1912, Virginia married the writer, Leonard Woolf. The couple founded Hogarth Press. Virginia suffered a mental break-down in 1916. She recovered and went on to write a number of novels, including: *Jacob's Room* 1922, *Mrs. Dalloway* 1925, and *To the Lighthouse* 1927. Her writing career continued until her death in 1941. Virginia, fearing a reoccurrence of her earlier break-down, and the stress it would place on her husband, committed suicide by drowning. Horace de Vere Cole died circa 1936.

The Prime Minister

On April 19th 1894, Mary de Vere Cole's second marriage took place, this time to Brigadier General Herbert Studd. Their daughter Dorothy married Captain Tom Powell, who subsequently wrote a book concerning the personal family history of the Burkes of St. Clerans. The Viscountess Selby of Argyll, Scotland, is the daughter of Captain Tom and Dorothy Powell. We have seen in an earlier chapter the Burke connection with the English Monarchy, there was also a connection with the next highest post, the Prime Minister of Great Britain. This post was held by one of the Chamberlain family, Rt. Hon. (Arthur) Neville Chamberlain, PC. FRS, LLD and DCI., M.P. Neville Chamberlain was born on March 18th 1869, in Birmingham. In 1910, Mary de Vere Cole's, daughter, Anne Vere Cole met Neville Chamberlain. The meeting took place at a theatre and dinner party, which had been arranged by Neville Chamberlain's half-sister. Neville and Anne were immediately attracted to each other and were married on January 5th, 1911. Later that same year their first child, a baby girl, Dorothy, was born. Their son Frank Chamberlain was born in 1914. Over the years Neville became heavily involved in politics, holding a number of government posts, including Minister for Health.

In 1935, because of the precarious situation in Europe, Neville Chamberlain, as Chancellor of the Exchequer for Great Britain, was making large sums of money available for defense. Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister of Great Britain, speaking of Neville Chamberlain, said that he had:- 'found him the most congenial of his colleagues.' As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chamberlain restored a fair degree of prosperity to the nation's trade. Towards the end of 1936, Stanley Baldwin's reputation was in serious decline. Neville Chamberlain was the obvious successor within the Cabinet. He had in fact been doing much of the day to day running of government, because of Baldwin's ill health. By 1937, Europe was in a tense situation with the prospect of war. Nazi Germany was reaching the height of its power. Italy had allied herself with Germany. Meanwhile in south-east Asia, Japan was also flexing her muscles. As Prime Minister, Chamberlain was committed to trying to solve Europe's problems by peaceful means. The Chiefs of Staff had advised the Cabinet that Britain was in no condition to fight a war against Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously.

In September 1938, Chamberlain travelled to Germany to meet with Adolf Hitler, the German Chancellor. Hitler demanded immediate occupation by



16. Neville Chamberlain with his daughter, Mrs. Stephen Lloyd and grandson James (1937, Courtesy, Francis Chamberlain)

his troops of the predominantly German territories of Czechoslovakia. There seemed to be a strong possibility of conflict. Although Chamberlain was angry at Hitler's behavior, he returned to London determined to keep the peace. On September 28th 1938, while addressing the House of Commons, Chamberlain received a note. It was reported that:- 'His whole face, his whole body, seemed to change. ...He appeared ten years younger and triumphant.' The atmosphere in the crowded house was tense, as he announced that Hitler had agreed to postpone mobilization of his troops for twenty-four hours, and that he would meet with him, Daladier and Mussolini at a conference, to be held in Munich. The House erupted into cheers immediately, and he received a standing ovation.

The following day the four leaders met at Munich. In order to secure a temporary peace, Czechoslovakia was sacrificed to a large extent at this

meeting. When Chamberlain returned to London, a great wave of relief swept throughout Britain. The terms of the Munich Agreement was debated in the House of Commons. By the end of the debate, it was clear that there was opposition to Chamberlain within the ranks of his own supporters. However, opinion polls conducted in the autumn and winter of 1938, suggest that Chamberlain had a majority. Most people thought that he was correct to avoid the catastrophe of war. During 1939, the situation in Europe gradually deteriorated. Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia in March, and declared Bohemia a protectorate. In late March, Chamberlain gave an immediate guarantee to Poland that Great Britain would stand by them if Germany invaded Polish territory, and shortly afterwards his guarantee was extended to Romania and Greece. It was decided that the British Territorial Army should be doubled, and Chamberlain announced that Parliament would be asked to authorize conscription. Although Chamberlain was suing for peace, he was under no illusion as to how strong the prospect of war loomed, and was preparing his country for the conflict ahead.

On September 1st 1939, German troops crossed the Polish frontier, and the Second World War began. On September 3rd, England and France declared war on Germany. Winston Churchill was appointed first lord of the admiralty, by Neville Chamberlain. In London, Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons and informed them that Britain was at war with Germany:-

This is a sad day for all of us, and to none is it sadder than to me. Everything that I have worked for, everything that I have believed in during my public life, has crashed into ruins. There is only one thing left for me to do: that is, to devote what strength and powers I have to forwarding the victory of the cause for which we have to sacrifice so much...I trust I may live to see the day when Hitlerism has been destroyed and a liberated Europe has been re-established. (Shirer W.L. 1985, p.619)

The Burke Cole family at St. Clerans, listened intently to Neville Chamberlain's broadcast to the nation, informing them that a state of war now existed with Germany. Like countless generations before them, the Burke Cole family were not slow to react. They immediately left home to join their regiments and prepare for the conflict which lay ahead. In April 1940, Germany attacked Norway and Denmark. British troops were quickly sent to Norway, but because of the lack of air support, they were forced to retreat. In the parliamentary debate that followed, Chamberlain's government collapsed. Chamberlain went to the Palace to tender his resignation and to advise King George VI to send for Churchill. Neville Chamberlain died on November 9th 1940. Paying tribute to his memory in the House of Commons, Winston Churchill said:-

...It fell to Neville Chamberlain in one of the supreme crises of the world to be

contradicted by events, to be disappointed in his hopes, and to be deceived and cheated by a wicked man. But what were these hopes in which he was disappointed? What were these wishes in which he was frustrated? What was that faith that was abused? They were surely among the most noble and benevolent instincts of the human heart - the love of peace, the toil for peace, the strife for peace, the pursuit of peace, even at great peril and certainly in utter disdain of popularity or clamor. (Shirer W.L. 1985, p.619)

Neville Chamberlain had done all that was humanly possible to avoid the worst conflict in the history of warfare, and should be remembered for his supreme effort in the pursuit of peace. In 1957, his son Frank, met and married Roma Parrott. Roma's family had emigrated to Australia in 1912, shortly after witnessing the launch of the *Titanic*. Roma was born in 1926, in South Australia. Frank and Roma had two children a son, Francis, born in 1960 and a daughter, Mary de Vere Chamberlain born in 1962. Roma worked for the BBC, and while making a radio programme about St. Michans Church in Dublin, she visited St. Clerans, with Anne Vere Cole. The visit took place during the late 1950s, when John Huston occupied the house. Francis Chamberlain married Mary O'Donovan from Skibbereen, County Cork in 1996. They have a common ancestor, Walter Taylor of Castle Taylor, from whom the Burke's of St. Clerans descend through the female line. In 1997, Francis and Mary Chamberlain travelled to Cooper's Creek, central Australia, to visit the area where Robert O'Hara Burke, his great great uncle had died. They then travelled to Galway to launch *The Shimmering Waste, the life and times of Robert O'Hara Burke*. While in Galway Francis also unveiled a plaque in honour of the great explorer from St. Clerans.

In 1998, Mary gave birth to a baby boy, Robert Neville Chamberlain, named in honour of two great historic family figures, who have achieved international fame.

The Last of The Burke's

Mary de Vere Cole's second son, Lieutenant Colonel John James Burke Cole OBE, fought in both World War I and World War II. Prior to the Great War, he served in India. When the war began, Lieutenant Colonel Cole's regiment was ordered to return to Europe. He saw a lot of action, being wounded three times during World War I. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre with palms, a French decoration for bravery. He was also awarded the Military Cross. On March 20th 1918, Lieutenant Colonel Cole married Aileen Charlotte McNeile. The couple spent their honeymoon at St. Clerans. Their marriage produced three sons, Major John William Burke Cole, Michael James Burke Cole and Alexander James Burke Cole. The financial situation at St. Clerans had deteriorated again after the death of Anne Celestine, and by the 1920s nearly all of the family silver had disappeared. Over the years much of the valuable silver-wear was sold, to pay the debts at St. Clerans. This silver was stamped with the Burke family crest, the cat. The very same emblem which Lord William de Burgh, wore on his helmet at the Battle of Athenry over six centuries earlier. Most of the financial problems which faced St. Clerans were a legacy, initially due to gambling debts accumulated during the first half of the nineteenth century. By the 1920s, the surviving silver-wear was taken to a bank in Galway City for safe keeping.

Lieutenant Colonel Cole inherited St. Clerans in 1930. Shortly afterwards the family started generating their own electricity. This meant that the previous dark corners in the cellars were illuminated as never before. In one of these dark recesses a very old water bottle (canteen) was found. When it was shown to John Rooney the butler, he said:- 'Sure, that's the explorer's water bottle.' By this he meant that it once belonged to Robert O'Hara Burke. In October 1967, during a ceremony in Queensland House, London, the water bottle and Burke's gold Founders Medal was given on loan to the Government of Queensland. Before displaying the items, extensive tests and research was carried out with regard to the water bottle, to ascertain a date, and also to identify the original owner of the bottle. Eventually they established for certain that it was indeed Robert O'Hara Burke's water bottle. They then had copies made of both the bottle and the medal. However the mystery remains as to how Robert O'Hara Burke's water bottle travel from Cooper's Creek, Central Australia, to St. Clerans? Considering just how many objects and documents were stolen as souvenirs after the 1860

Expedition, it seems almost impossible that the water bottle would have survived. Burke's old childhood nurse, Mrs. Ellen Doherty, had travelled to Australia, and attended Burke's funeral. However, it is not known if Mrs. Doherty ever returned to Ireland. Even if she did, it is highly unlikely that she would have acquired the explorers water bottle, and returned it to St. Clerans without the knowledge of the family.

The entire family were assembled at St. Clerans in September 1939, when their relative, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Neville Chamberlain, declared war on Germany. After World War I, Lieutenant Colonel Cole had been forced to resign from the military because of the wounds he received during the conflict. He was determined not to let this situation prevent him from going into action, and like a true warrior, he returned to his old regiment and offered his services. However he was too old to be sent into action overseas, but he did manage to have himself reinstated into another section of the military service. He was placed in command of a section of the home defense forces. The old warrior retired from service in 1944, and was awarded the OBE. He outlived the war and died in 1948. His wife, Aileen Charlotte, also left St. Clerans with the outbreak of the war, and offered her services to help the war effort. She joined the Red Cross and worked diligently for the organisation throughout the war. Difficult as it was, both of them visited St. Clerans as often as possible during those years.

Their sons also served in the war effort. Major John William Burke Cole J.P., D.L., joined the Coldstream Guards in 1940. He was sent to fight in the North African campaign. On November 10th 1942, Adolf Hitler gave orders to his chiefs of staff to seize Tunisia, before General Eisenhower's troops arrived there. France had imposed a protectorate over Tunisia in 1881, and at the outbreak of war it was still under French domination. Nearly a quarter of a million German and Italian troops, plus a huge arsenal of weaponry was poured into the battle. The Germans attacked the naval port on November 27th, however, the French sailors held out long enough to allow the crews carry out the orders of Admiral de Laborde, to scuttle their ships. Thus the French fleet was lost. On Christmas Day 1942, Major John William Burke Cole was wounded and taken prisoner of war in Tunisia.

His brother Michael, served with the Royal Air Force. He was a skilled pilot commanding great respect, and was quickly promoted to Squadron Leader. He fought bravely throughout the war, and was awarded the DFC. The Battle of Britain began on July 10th 1940, from then until the end of September 1940, Britain came under repeated attacks by the German Luftwaffe. On September 15th an enormous force of 1,300 German aircraft launched a two pronged attack on London. In a cloudless sky the R.A.F. went up to engage the enemy. The battle expanded out over the whole of southern England and lasted all that day, ultimately forcing the Germans to

retreat. The German High Command now realised that Britain's air defenses would not be easily destroyed. However, towards the end of September the Germans launched another 850 aircraft against Britain, but this attack was also repulsed. The success of the British air defenses was largely due to the quality of their aircraft, the *Spitfire* and *Hurricane*, the use of radar, and of course the bravery of its pilots. Sir Winston Churchill paying tribute to these men, said:- 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.' The life expectancy of an R.A.F. pilot, during W.W.II was relatively short. Fortunately Michael survived the war, and inherited St. Clerans after the death of his father.

However all was not as it seemed, Michael found that in order to live comfortably at St. Clerans, the house required an enormous amount of money to be spent on repairs. There was also the huge cost of maintenance, and because of this situation, he felt that his only option was to sell the house. Michael did not want to see St. Clerans fall into ruin. He hoped to attract the interest of wealthy buyers who could afford to carry out the necessary refurbishment's. Sadly before any sale was finalised, Michael was killed while flying on active service in April 1953. He was intestate, so the ownership of St. Clerans reverted to his mother, who continued with the purpose of selling. Finally in 1954, the Burkes relinquished their beloved St. Clerans. The Land Commission purchased the manor house and estate, and sold them to Mr. John Huston, the film director, in 1955. However, one small bastion at St. Clerans remains in Burke Cole hands, the old Tower House.

John Huston at St. Clerans



17. The Huston Family
(At St. Clerans 1956, after Huston, J.)

John Huston first came to Ireland in 1951, shortly before starting work on the film, *The African Queen*. He was invited to Ireland by Lady Oonagh Oranmore and Browne. On the occasion of his visit, there was a hunt ball in the Gresham Hotel, Dublin, which he attended. The Galway Blazers had organized this particular event. Huston said afterwards that he fully expected someone to be killed before the night was over. As the evening wore on, the music became faster and spirits ran higher. The young men started a game of 'follow the leader'. They used one of the large tables in the centre of the room as a jump. A waiter tried to stop them by swinging a champagne bucket at each participant, but this action only added a new dimension to the game, making it more attractive so that more of them joined in the fun. Needless to say, Mr. Huston really enjoyed himself at the ball. In 1953, Huston returned to Ireland, this time he brought with him his fourth wife, Enrica Soma, and also their children, Walter Anthony and Anjelica. Huston loved the hunting scene in Ireland, and in particular, Galway. He believed that the Irish horsemen were the best in the world, with the possible exception of the Afghans.

It was while taking part in a Galway hunt, that Huston first saw St. Clerans. While riding across a field, he saw the manor house and old ruined castle in the distance and inquired about the place. Some months later, Huston and Enrica attended the Galway Races, which is one of the biggest racing festivals in Ireland. While in Galway, Enrica went to stay with some friends. When Enrica returned to meet Huston, she told him that she had seen a beautiful old house named St. Clerans, which was vacant and for sale. He went immediately to view the manor house and estate. Although the roof leaked and some of the flooring was missing, his interest was apparent. Looking up at the old Georgian Manor House, Huston fell in love with the place instantly and decided to buy it. The estate consisted of one hundred Irish acres, in an extraordinary setting. There was a great walled tree garden, full of exotic species of trees from all over the world. It seems that Irish sea captains would sometimes bring back trees from various places around the world to plant at St. Clerans. There was also an enormous vegetable garden. The estate was in two sections, with the manor house to the fore. To access the other section one walked down a gravel path through the trees and across the trout stream. The grooms quarters, stables and a stewards cottage, were situated close to the old tower house.

Later, Huston said:- '...it cost very little to buy, but a small fortune and the better part of two years to restore.' The cottage was restored and became Enrica's domain, even after the restoration work was complete at the manor house, she still preferred the cottage. In the section above the stables, there were two spacious lofts, Huston set up a studio in one, and his assistant, Gladys Hill, lived in the other. Before the restoration of St. Clerans was finished, Huston had been collecting objects from around the world, and from different periods. From Japan he brought a number of screens from various periods, fan paintings, and a Japanese bath which he had installed on the lower floor. He imported old tiles from Mexico for the kitchen and all the bathrooms. Huston installed a gallery of pre-Columbian art, there was also paintings by Juan Gris, Morris Graves and a 'Water Lily' by Monet. On the wall of the Grey Room, he hung a fourteenth century Sicilian carved wooden crucifix. Two porcelain drum-stools from China flanked one of the sitting-rooms. There were bronzes and fabrics from Bhutan. His own bedroom contained a big canopied four-poster Florentine matrimonial bed, and two Louis XIV leather chairs with brass studs. The chest of drawers were originally from a French cathedral, and had been used to hold the vestments. The wall was decorated with a thirteenth-century Greek icon. All of the bedrooms and bathrooms had fireplaces. The main entrance to the manor house was flanked by stone lions, carved in the medieval style. Over the years he continued adding to his collection of ornaments. It is obvious from his extensive collection, that Huston had broad ranging tastes in art.

Huston had a constant stream of famous visitors to St. Clerans, including motion-pictures stars, writers, musicians and painters. The list of distinguished guests included: Cary Grant, Elizabeth Taylor, Montgomery Clift and Marlon Brando. Among the regular visitors were John and Elaine Steinbeck. During the renovations, Huston had the two blocked south bedroom windows reopened. Before doing so, he was warned by local people that by reopening the windows, he was tempting fate, as the ghost of Anthony Daly would surely come back and haunt the place. According to Huston, shortly after having the windows opened, the bold Daly started to make his presence felt. Doors and windows would open and shut, apparently on their own. Daly was seen twice during Huston's time at St. Clerans, and could be heard walking the hallways. When the ghost does make an appearance, he is always dressed in knee breeches and a long sleeved shirt. Notwithstanding, can one really distinguish such sounds from the creaks and groans of a big old house? In 1820, after Daly's death, his mother was reputed to have pronounced a curse on the Burkes of St. Clerans, saying:- 'No Burke will die peaceable in his bed again.' Some may say that the Burkes tended to meet with violent and tragic deaths because of the curse, however when one considers the adventurous and military careers



18. John Huston
(Dining Room at St. Clerans 1966, after Huston, J.)

these men persuaded, such a fate would be almost unavoidable. During one of John Steinbeck's visits to St. Clerans, he tried to pursue the story, with the intention of writing a book on the subject, but was advised against it by a local priest.

Because of his love for horses and hunting, Huston would travel the backroads of County Galway during the summer looking for horses to buy. Over a year after joining the Glaway Blazers, Huston was approached by the committee and offered the post of Joint Master of the hunt, which he accepted. Christmas at St. Clerans was a wonderful time. On Christmas Eve, a party was always held for the staff, neighbours and all their children. The decorated Christmas Tree occupied the full corner of the inner hall and rose through the stairwell to the floor above. All the gifts were placed beneath the tree. With the arrival of Santa, the children's faces would light up and their eyes were wide with delight, John Huston took great pleasure in seeing all the happy children. A local man, Tommy Holland, was the regular Santa, but one year when he was ill, John Steinbeck had to fill the post. After all the presents were distributed, the adults would retire to the kitchen for food and drinks. There was singing, dancing and poetry, the old gardener Odie Spellman would recall tales of the old days at St. Clerans. Christmas Day began with champagne being served, and no gifts could be unwrapped until all were present. At about 12.30, friends from all over the county would arrive and exchange gifts. The dining room table was decorated with Irish linen, Georgian silver and old Waterford crystal, dinner was served at about 3.00 p.m. On St. Stephen's Day, the Galway Blazers would assemble on the lawn of St. Clerans to prepare for the days hunt. In the evening when all had returned from the hunt, the manor house was full of musicians, playing tin whistles, accordions and fiddles. There was also performances of traditional Irish dancing, by Anjelica Huston, and some of her local friends. 'Wren Boys' wandered throughout the grounds, dressed in the most outlandish attire. They sang, danced and recited poetry for a few coins. When they received their reward, they would move on to the next house and repeat their performance, hoping for a similar reception.

In 1967, Carson McCullers, the authoress, visited St. Clerans. Although she was very ill at the time, she was anxious to see the place that John Huston loved so much. John had told her so much about St. Clerans, that she longed to visit the old manor house. Shortly after returning from her visit to St. Clerans, Carson died. Had she not made the trip, she may have lived a little longer. However, she was determined to see St. Clerans, before she died. According to Huston, St. Clerans was once described as one of the most beautiful homes in the world, and to him it was all of that and much more. He once described St. Clerans as a haven, and when he returned from a trip abroad, he entered an atmosphere, which was a world apart. Finally after

spending eighteen glorious years at St. Clerans, Huston was forced to sell the manor house and estate, and leave Ireland. In his biography, *An Open Book*, when writing of his experience as Joint Master of the hunt, he states:- 'They were ten of the best years of my life'. The decision to sell was forced upon him by inflation and rising costs, St. Clerans became so expensive to run, that he had to stay away working in order to maintain the place. After he sold St. Clerans, Huston sometimes felt as if he had sold a little part of his soul.