

Powerscourt and the Abbey
July 23, 1985 - Tuesday

Powerscourt was the unplanned surprise of this day (and our Dublin visit) but even before it happened Pat was surprised at the breakfast table in this Edwardian home to find that two "new" guests, a father and son, the Bolens, were from Lawrence, Kansas, and they equally surprised to discover what Pat knew about Lawrence.

After breakfast we decided our first move should be to motor to the town of Enniskerry, about fifteen miles south of Dublin, where Paid's wife, Mary, said we would find a Davies shop stocked with the style of woolen shirts made for women — that Elizabeth hoped I could find. So, we headed south getting a brief glimpse of Dublin to the east. The morning was bright with good sun and a few clouds.

As we turned westward for the last few miles the land became more hilly and suddenly we were in the central part of Enniskerry, and Pat exclaiming, "Look, there's Davy's Shop ahead!" After selecting two shirts (I asked Pat to help) we went to a small bakery for a cup of coffee and a roll, and then to a nearby gift shop - making a few purchases. By then we had decided we would not return to Dublin without visiting the publicized Powerscourt Estate just outside the town. (I recalled that this was something Mary had hoped to see back in 1965, that we didn't manage.) It was certainly well worth the time Pat and I took out of our day's schedule.

I had not remembered that Powerscourt is one of the great gardens of Europe, developed from an ancient estate held by a Norman knight, Eustace le Poer (hence the derivation, Powerscourt). The present house, a rectangular building of hewn granite

was designed back in 1730 by the architect, Richard Cassels, and extensively damaged by fire in 1974; so the great house, beautiful as it is, stands empty & closed. It had over 100 rooms. Englands George IV was entertained in its great Ballroom in 1821.

One can scarcely comprehend the beauty of the gardens and landscaping. Pat and I did a good bit of walking. The aspect is mainly south-easterly with the Wicklow Mountains giving the shelter on the south and west that provides a mild maritime like climate. (The elevation here is said to be only about 300-400 feet.) Severe frosts and heavy snowfalls are rare; that old Norman knight knew a good site when he selected this area!

We left our rental Ford Orion in the car park, amidst other cars and tour buses. Fortunately, there were not a great many visitors. We walked the length of the main promenade overlooking the outlying terraces and distant Triton Fountain — centered in a small lower lake. (The fountain is a copy, "with modifications", of the one in Rome's Piazza Barberini.) Pat & I were amused to learn that the brilliant eccentric who designed all these terraces (it took over 30 years) was one Daniel Robertson who suffered from gout and orchestrated this symphony of landscaping clutching not a baton but a bottle of sherry. "When the bottle was exhausted so was he and he retired from designing for the day!"

We walked as far as the Pepper Pot Tower, noticing particularly some magnificent trees. Then we discovered these grounds contain an extensive assortment of the world's conifers, planned with forethought,

and now constituting the backbone of commercial forestry in Ireland. Walking back from Pepper Pot Tower (whose history we wondered about) we admired again the Triton Fountain whose jet of water rises almost 100 feet, the panoramic background being the gentle field-partitioned green slopes rising up to the Wicklow range with Sugar Loaf mountain demanding one's attention. This is the view the former residents of Powerscourt enjoyed from this stately home — a breathtaking sweep of grandeur; and one knows the backdrop of majestic Sugar Loaf must have been much the same even before the Norman Conquest of 1066 and later in 1609 when King James I granted the place to the Wingfield who "took the castle by storm" from the O'Toole, a powerful Irish clan in Wicklow. Of course, the elegant mosaic terrace about midway between us and the Triton Fountain was

designed about two centuries later.
The black and white stones used for the
mosaic designs were taken appropriately
from the beach of the nearby coastal
town of Bray. To the right and left of
the 100-foot fountain, and not visible
are the family's pets' cemetery and a
Japanese garden made back in 1908
on reclaimed bog land. (We decided
not to walk this distance since it
also involved descending and ascending
route. We also thought it best at this
part of our surprise visit to forego
the Powerscourt Waterfall which lies
four miles away, across the Estate,
one of the highest in the British Isles,
where water falls nearly 400 feet
down the slippery moss and fern-softened
granite drop of the Wicklow range -) So
we left with one last look at
some of the statuary such as the
Laocoön brought from Rome about
1830. The single block of Wicklow
granite was quarried at Glencree's

quarry, eight miles distant, and required one week to be brought on wooden rollers to this present site.

So we took leave, reluctantly; one had to shake off the charm-spell of the place. I subscribe to the words on the illustrated folder purchased at the souvenir shop: "Powerscourt cannot be appreciated in words. It is there to be seen and above all to be enjoyed." I am sure Pat will recall this surprise interlude and its enjoyment with warmth and delight for many years to come.

And, so with some light fatigue we get ourselves back to Dublin. I appreciated the chance for a siesta as ahead of us was dinner with Paid, his Mary and his parents.

Paid and Mary picked us up at Mrs. Kirrane's at 7PM; we asked them to allow time to come in and see the Edwardian elegance of our "B+B" lodgings, since Paid had chosen it, but had not seen it. They were very favorably impressed. We left soon to join his parents.