

Altogether a great time at Waterford's Curraghmore House

Lord Waterford last weekend witnessed close to 15,000 festival-goers descend on his ancestral home

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Jacqui Corcoran

At some point over the course of the All Together Now festival in Co Waterford last weekend, a rumour started circulating. It concerned one Lord Waterford, proprietor of the country estate in Portlaw where festivities were under way. The tale spread that at a particularly late hour, when a famous-to-some DJ was stretching his decibels on the Lawns of Tranquillity and the light projection was at full tilt on the ancient exterior of Curraghmore House, an upstairs window opened. And the lord himself appeared (some claimed he was wearing pink pyjamas) before proceeding to shake his lordly fist at raucous revellers below and rage about the music being too loud.

... On the Wednesday after the weekend before, in the far-from-raucous surroundings of the house library, Lord Waterford gives a chuckle.

“Oh no,” he says. “That didn’t happen.” He seems a little chuffed at the thoughts of becoming the stuff of festival legend. Was he actually at home enjoying the festival for the weekend?

“Oh gosh yes,” he says emphatically. Though in truth this pleasant, quiet man, who has the look and demeanour of a shy country farmer, does not look exactly, well, festival fit.

“

I liked the tribute bands. And we all loved Jimmy Cliff. He was the star of the festival I think

In the wake of the first of the five years of annual festivities he’s signed up for, is he happy with how it all went?

“POD festival promoters are very experienced at this and it all paid off. They did extensive work in the lead up. It worked well and ran smoothly. It stayed dry. We learned a lot from this year and they’re already planning for next year.”

His daughter Camilla arrives bearing tea. Of course, it’s not some mug with the teabag still in. On a petite tray she presents a dainty cup and a saucer of madeleines. She’s in jogging pants, is young and enthusiastic.

“So, have you spent the weekend partying?” I ask, hoping I’m not overstepping some mark.

“Oh gosh yes,” she says.

“Did you get any sleep?”

“No,” ventures her dad.

Reggie Watts

“Well,” says the 23-year-old, who would be forgiven for thinking that dad and mum had just managed to lay on a party that most 23-year-olds could only imagine in their wildest dreams. “My bedroom is right up the top. When I could hear Reggie Watts live from the garden, that was pretty amazing.”

So, while his garden was filled with 15,000 guests, where did the good lord locate himself?

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“I was out listening to music at the various stages around the grounds. I wore earplugs on the first night when I came home. But on the second night I just fell asleep.”

Was he familiar with the line-up?

“Not really. I liked the tribute bands. And we all loved Jimmy Cliff. He was the star of the festival I think. I met him. He walks like an elderly man, but his voice is amazing.”

So. Not exactly finger-on-the-pulse music maestro is our lordy, as he’s affectionately known locally.

“Would you like a tour of the house?” he suddenly asks, enthusiastically.

“That would be nice, Lord . . . Milord?” I stumble (what does one say?)

“

A rather fine hulking block of a historic house, it’s been around for a long time and is loaded with precious artefacts

And slowly, things becomes clearer.

It’s all staggeringly lovely in a lived-in museum sort of way. Along the hallway, walls are lined with glass cabinets packed with intriguing china I’d love to have a month or two to examine in more detail. There’s a child’s ride-on toy – a dappled pair of ponies on wheels I’d wager was not a Smyths purchase. In other rooms, the walls are choc-a-block with dark, old oil portraits.

“Your ancestors?” I ask.

“Some of them, yes, says Lord Waterford.

“What do you think they’d make of the shenanigans?”

“Oh I think they’d approve, they were rather fond of parties, I believe.”

“Why would you bring it on yourself?” I ask. “This was a very invasive home party.”

It’s the question you’d have to ask. This place, grand and all as it is, is very much a home. Sitting comfortably amongst myriad treasures are family photos; in the library, eclectic scatterings of books look as though they’re actually being read by someone; a family pet, a leggy brindle lurcher, comes ambling in with the swagger of one who’s given the run of the place. The phrase your home is your castle lingers in the air. Curraghmore is both home and castle-of-sorts. A rather fine hulking block of a historic house, it’s been around for a long time and is loaded with precious artefacts. You could be forgiven for being a bit precious.

Lord
Waterford
and his
daughter
Camilla.

And then there are the gardens. Acres of grass and woodland. Very decent gardens. When you’d say it’s a garden with “features” you’d really mean it. There’s a stone-rimmed pond out back; long stretches of balustrades they’d have to have been looking at in a protective sort of way, anticipating the antics of a very large cohort of invitees. There’s the shell house, an ancient structure lined entirely in shells. And then there’s the pair of sculptures anyone can see are a bit special.

“They were a bit of a nightmare alright. They’re by Pierre Louis Rouillard, a Parisian sculptor whose work is in the Louvre. One of them has a tail I was sure would get broken. We had to have security there around the clock.”

So why would he open his home in this way?

He points to the ceiling, the very beautiful decorative plaster work.

‘Income stream’

“Big place like this you need to diversify as much as you can. We enjoyed it, but the main reason is to get another income stream.” The house and gardens are open to the public, who pay for tours. While revenue from this, the farm, event venue hire etc does help to keep the ship afloat, it’s not enough to tackle the big maintenance jobs. “At the moment, the main project is to repair the roof on the house so we can preserve that ceiling and everything here.”

Driving away from Curraghmore House, up the neverending driveway, it’s remarkable to see how quickly and thoroughly the site is being cleared. The grounds are already pretty free of festival evidence and looking surprisingly unscathed.

John Reynolds, head of PoD festivals, the brainchild behind All Together Now, promised the Curraghmore residents he’d leave their home as he’d found it. By all accounts, he’s being true to his word. Public reaction is overwhelmingly positive, and bar some locally highlighted issues around wheelchair access, there hasn’t been a cross word. There’s good will about and a confidence that glitches will be ironed out before next year.

At a point along the driveway, two large herons swing down to put on a bit of a dance in the air. Herons have something of a reputation for being quite sombre, solitary birds, but this pair are giving it socks overhead. As if to join in the post-party celebrations, a brash young cock pheasant runs across the drive in front of me with a proprietorial air. As if he own the place. Which, in a way I suppose, he does. Again. Now that the party’s over.

Curraghmore House is open Wednesday to Sunday until October 1st. Guided tours of house and gardens at 1am and 2pm. Large groups by appointment. Event manager Alan Walsh: 086 8211917 alan@curraghmore.ie

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