

Ballynakillew,
Ballinrobe,
Co. Mayo.

The Editor, *Irish Forestry*

Re. Staying at Casino in Avondale

Sir,

As a professional forester since I qualified in 1956 and as a sometime (1959-60 and 1969-71) Editor of *Irish Forestry* there is one item which I can now read, and understand. That is the 'Trees, Woods and Literature' feature. Concerning selection No. 34, more information about J.M. Synge's holiday in Avondale is available in the book *'My Uncle John – Edward Stephens's Life of J.M. Synge'* edited by Andrew Carpenter (Oxford University Press, 1974). Synge's older sister, Annie, married a Dublin solicitor, Henry Stephens, and their son, Edward, collected all available records of Synge, including his own recollections of the man, with a view to preparing a biography. The resulting unpublished typescript eventually reached the Library of Trinity College, Dublin.

The Stephens family habitually spent summer holidays in the house known as Castle Kevin, near Annamoe, Co. Wicklow. In summer 1897 Castle Kevin was not available and Synge and his mother joined the Stephens family in 'Casino' on the Avondale estate. Stephens's father declined to stay with the group as he 'did not like staying at the steward's house instead of the mansion house of Avondale'. Parnell was dead since 1891 and the main house was empty. The estate had been bequeathed to his wife (formerly O'Shea) and daughters in 1888 but she received nothing. It appears that 'the will had needed to be re-executed after their marriage [in 1891, following her divorce from O'Shea] for it to remain valid'. (Jane Jordan: *Kitty O'Shea, an Irish Affair*. Sutton Publishing, 2005). Avondale was bought by the state for forestry in 1894 and opened as a school in 1904. Mrs. Stephens told her son that the owner 'had been a Protestant who had joined the nationalists and had come to a bad end'.

Casino (literally, Italian for 'a small house') is referred to by Stephens as a 'dower house' while Parnell's brother John Howard Parnell in his *Memoir* (London, 1916) describes it as 'generally the home of the managers of the Avondale estate'.

While the school was located in Avondale House, Casino served as the official residence of the Superintendent.

After the school had moved to Kinnitty Castle, Co. Offaly and Shelton Abbey, Co. Wicklow in the 1950s, Avondale House was redeveloped as a residential Extension School and Casino (a pleasant one-storey over-basement Georgian style house) was demolished to make room for an amenity car park.

Yours sincerely,

Niall OCarroll.