

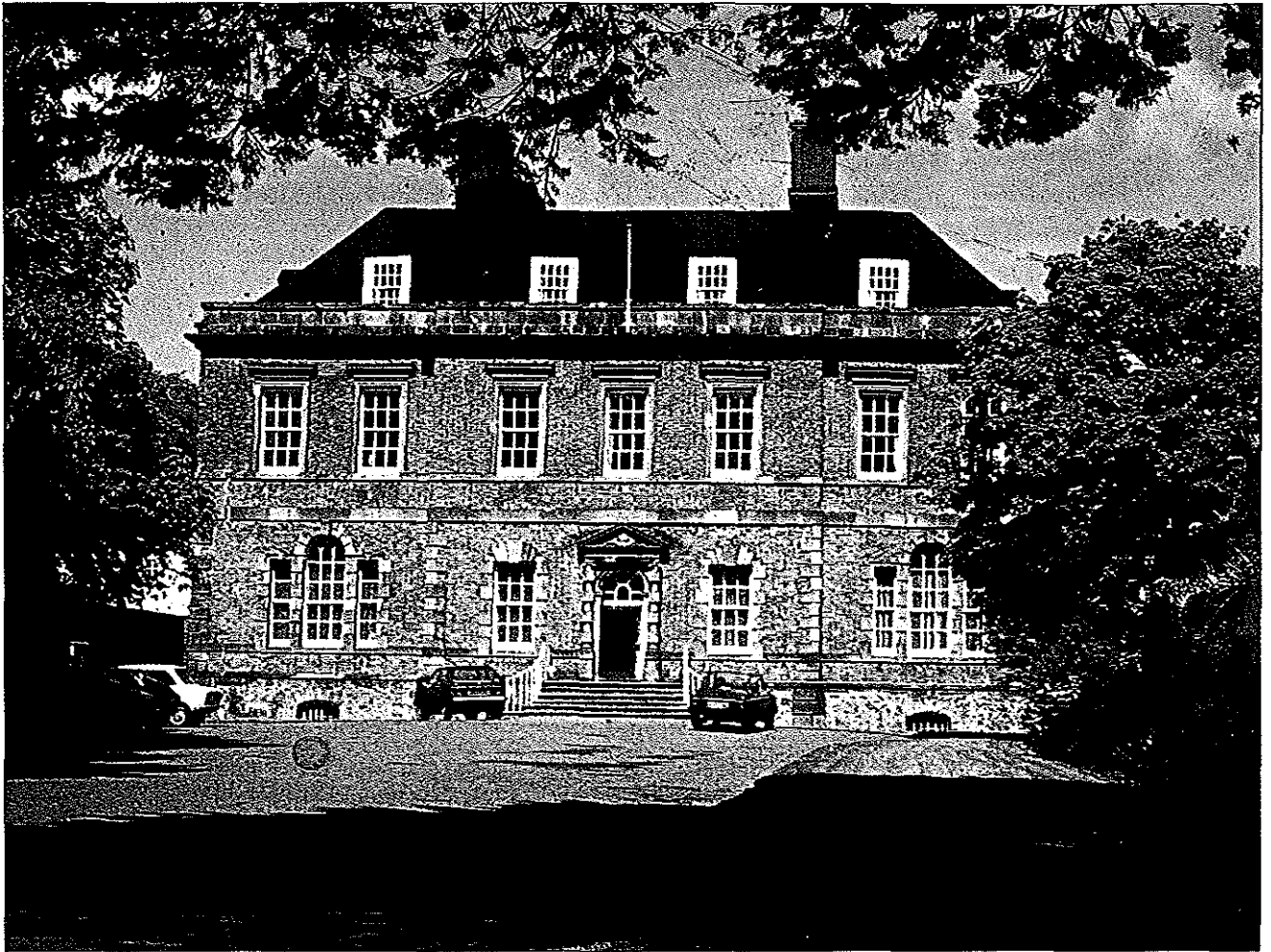
IRISH ECHO

# Travel Ireland 1991



*Today's country house hotels offer the old-world charm for which Ireland is famed while providing their guests with the finest amenities.*

# LUXURY IRISH HOTELS



Cashel Palace

BY NICHOLAS FOX WEBER

“It seemed to her that certain parts of the world must produce happiness, as they produce peculiar plants which will flourish nowhere else.” So dreamed Madame Bovary. The object of her reverie was a better place to spend her honeymoon with the unfortunate Charles. Flaubert’s restless Emma longed for “lands with musical names where wedding nights leave behind them a more delicious indolence.” If only she could have voyaged to Ballylickey and Rennascreena, cast her eye upon the sea at Tragumna and the fields at Ballinaspittle, and spent nights in the grand hotels of the region, her marriage to Charles—and one of the world’s finest novels—might have taken a very different course.

Those mellifluously named villages are in the south of Ireland, an area of sweeping coasts and sheltered harbors, fertile hills and ancient stone circles, where you can enjoy some of the friendliest—and at the same time most polished—hospitality in the world. Its best hotels, which range in size from large-scaled houses to small chateaux, produce amenities usually associated with names like Ritz and Claridge in some splendid rural locations. After touring castle ruins, fishing a salmon river, or playing on rhododendron-lined golf links—or perhaps just stocking up on Aran knit sweaters of a color range as vast as that of the local wildflowers—you can enjoy a rare blend of flawless service with a sense of home. For each of these fine spots belongs very much to the person or family that runs it, and they will make you feel like old friends as well as pampered guests.

ley and mountains beyond to Cromwell early in the 17th century, but the family regained possession in the 1930s. Today it is Michael O'Callaghan who will tell you which stretch of the river to fish for trout; his wife Jane and their son William who will orchestrate your sensational meals; and 5-year-old Diarmuid who will leave his princely toys in front of the elegant pillared Georgian facade, against the curved ironwork of the flower-filled Victorian conservatory, or near the formal box hedge inside the courtyard formed by marvelous stone stable buildings out back. Another person at Longueville who will make you feel very much at home is Catherine Nolan, who has been there for 19 years and explains her role by saying, "I'm here to see that people are looked after." This means welcoming you, heaping firewood on the fire while you sip tea, taking your order for dinner, and seeing to any other need you might have. As you relax from Irish trekking and sip a drink in one of the over-stuffed, crimson plush-covered armchairs in the bar, she will guide you through a menu that might start with a warm salad of rare filet of wood pigeon (fed on the grain in that courtyard out back) with oyster mushrooms; or a light nage of salmon, monkfish, brill, and prawn from nearby Castle-townbere. The starters might be followed by Longueville's own delicately-flavored lamb roasted with thyme, or perhaps excellent veal medallions in a light madeira sauce, and then, according to season, a blackberry tartlet with its own coulis or a succulent and wonderfully unsweet apple tart, both made with fruit grown in the Longueville gardens. A sur-



feit of splendid clarets and other choices from Michael O'Callaghan's wine list will suit these marvels well. Ireland is always a country of great breakfasts, but here they are incomparable with poached plums, gooseberries, rhubarb, and other local fruit served with homemade yogurt; breads and jams fresh from the kitchen; pink blackwater trout; eggs with homemade sausages of various types, lean rashers, black and white puddings, grilled tomatoes and even lamb's liver.

Longueville seems an authentic country house in its rough edges as well as its finery. Sitting under the well-restored plastered and brightly painted Italianate ceiling in the dining room, you might as easily glimpse at the electric coffee machine as the heavy, inlaid mahogany doors. There are 1950s lounge chairs in with the 18th century fauteuils, and some of the plumbing is a bit challenging. But

where else can you look out at an arrangement of aged oak trees planted in the formation of the battle lines at Waterloo, at fields covered with grazing sheep, or—as luck had it on our last visit—at a vast arching rainbow the end of which appeared to be in the vineyard right next to the house?

**A**t Cashel Palace, the man in charge is Ray Carroll, but you are more likely to feel that your host is an Episcopal bishop of the 18th century. That's because this extraordinarily grand and opulent structure was indeed the palace of those bishops, for 230 years. It still has the regal look to it. I will never forget arriving there one New Year's Day. Even at that time of year the fully-blossomed sweet peas made a great splash of color in front of the commanding Palladian brick and lime-

*(Continued on page 14)*

**Extraordinary settings and the warmth of Irish hospitality make a stay at an Irish country house hotel memorable. Such is the case with Longueville House (above) and Cashel Palace (below).**

