

**Ireland's Haunted Castles: Discovering Charleville Castle**

*E-Newsletter Article for [www.IrishFireside.com](http://www.IrishFireside.com)*

A wrong turn down a forgotten road kept the turrets of Charleville Castle just over the treeline and disappointingly out of reach. Realizing we were not getting any closer, Liam and I abandoned our car and, instead followed an ancient path through the woods, hoping it would lead us to the castle's entrance. Overgrown rhododendrons blocked the midday sun and the rustling leaves and snapping twigs around us served as reminders that although the area lacked "no trespassing" signs, we were probably still in a place we were not supposed to be.

It was a relief when the path ended at the castle's front gates. Slightly beyond the wrought iron entrance, we saw the enormous, ivy-clad gothic castle standing just as it did at the turn of the 19th century. The giant wooden front door was studded with ancient metal rivets and the darkened windows hid any signs of life. We approached slowly, confused as to whether the grounds were open to the public.

We rang the brass bell that hung next to the massive door. From inside, we heard the shuffling of little feet and then, just on the other side of the door, a child's giggle. We both held our breath waiting to hear the sound again. Quiet. Spooked, but not deterred, we rang the bell once more. This time the door creaked open to reveal the castle's keeper, Dudley Stuart, who looked more like a professor than a ghost.

He smiled as he welcomed us, "I'm afraid I don't have a tour guide today, but you are welcome to look around." Inside, we were greeted by a dark wood foyer surrounding a dramatic staircase and a large chandelier.

"Was that a child we heard?" Liam inquired.

"Ah yes, that would be one of our resident ghosts," he said with a wink as he discretely pointed to the door under the stairs. A young girl could be seen peeking through the crack.

Partly relieved and partly disappointed that our giggling greeter was of the living world, we followed our host. A bit disheveled and clearly juggling a variety of tasks, Dudley dug up some papers from a desk tucked in the shadows and handed us a pamphlet about the castle. "Which of you two is the eldest?"

Liam sheepishly raised his hand.

"Then you're in charge. I'm interviewing someone for a job, and then I have to go into town. Feel free to look in the rooms on the upper level and go ahead and walk around outside."

Noticing that the papers he handed us stated a price for tours, I asked where we should pay. "Ah, no tour, no charge. Just take good care of the place while I'm gone." With that, he marched up the stairs to his interview.

This relatively young castle was built in an era when fortification was not an issue, so the gothic showcase had large windows and elaborate plasterwork. There we were, unescorted and snooping through the large dusty rooms filled with antique furniture and dozens of handwritten placards demanding we refrain from smoking. As we wandered from one grand but worn space to the next, we were mindful of whether we left the doors open or closed, for we had heard tales of Charleville's playful ghosts and their reputation for locking cabinets and closing doors.

Eventually, we found ourselves at the last door on the upper level. As Liam pushed it open, the air on the other side was distinctly cooler than the air in the hall. The dust was three times thicker on the sills and

baseboards in this area, and the windows were frosted with dirt. "I don't think this area is open to the public," I said quietly.

Being a bit more adventurous, Liam whispered, "I didn't see a sign," as he approached a very unusual, cantilevered staircase that clung to the wall. The stairs did not appear safe and a frayed rope drooping across the stairs reinforced the idea. Liam twisted his neck over the banister to see the passage to the upper floors. "Wow," was all he could utter as he looked up the ornately carved railing that extended all the way to the top floor.

As we made our way from the staircase to a room in one of the round turrets, the floor creaked below us and, oddly, above us. The sound stopped when we stopped, making it difficult to tell if we were being tracked by the paranormal or just hearing the groans of an old home.

Inside the turret room there were tables covered in hundreds of old dishes, which were distinctly cleaner than anything else in the room. Beneath the dishes, the room was still outfitted in antique furniture. Eerie paintings watched over us from the walls. As I stepped in for a closer look at an old clock on the mantel, Dudley's voice interrupted the silence. "I'll be off now, but wanted to check in with you before I go."

Hiding my uneasiness with the space, I asked, "What's with all the dishes?"

"It's for a local charity, they sell them here about once a month." With that, Dudley escorted us back to the main hall before packing his interview guest and a bicycle in his car. Before ducking into the car, he said, "Take care, now, Liam and Corey." He remembered our names.

Outside, the castle proved to be as interesting as the inside. The overgrown gardens still offered traces of their formal past, and a bank of outdoor showers and various tarps scattered about the ground revealed that the property was offered as a summer campsite for backpackers. The lived-in feeling of the outside contributed to the overall strangeness of the site.

Aged grills and discolored plastic furniture served as modern relics in the back garden. Near the once grand stables, a young woman was hanging a modern array of fashions on a communal clothesline. Beside her, the girl we saw inside giggled as she played with the various toys strewn about. Both ignored us as we peered into the windows of the derelict stables.

Around the back we found a volunteer named Sullivan who was tending a garden. He was eager to take a break to tell us about the American woman who held the lease on the castle, Dudley's slow-going efforts to restore it and the Woodstock-like music festivals held on the grounds each summer. "It's a communal place. I work here a couple times a week for some quiet, and they give me soup. There's some in the kitchen. Would you like some soup?"

We politely declined his offer, but pressed him for more details about the castle. He told us of the cycle of extravagance and destitution that has accompanied the estate. Then we asked about the ghosts.

"I'd say I'm not the one to tell yee about that sort of thing."

Not sure if he had no story to tell or if he was simply afraid to share the details, we asked again.

"I'm really not the one to tell yee about that," he emphasized, quickly transitioning the conversation to Dudley's search for a new tour guide. "Come back another time, and he'll have a new guide. They'll know about that sort of thing. It doesn't take 'em long to have a ghost story." With that, he wished us well and returned to his gardening.

As we walked to the front of the house, we lost sight of Sullivan and the mysterious child and her mother were nowhere to be seen. The castle garnered a lonely, isolated atmosphere. The two of us were already planning our next visit and discussing who among our friends would appreciate this unusual and potentially haunted treasure.

Once again at the gates, we glanced back for one more look. At that very moment, the front door slowly closed. Liam and I looked at each other, and without a word headed down the path and back to our car.

Charleville Castle is located one mile south of Tullamore in County Offaly. It is available for tours-by-appointment from noon to 6pm in high season. Price is €16 for one adult or a couple and €6 for additional guests. Note that this castle is pronounced CHAR-leville, not SHAR-leville.  
[www.charlevillecastle.com](http://www.charlevillecastle.com)

#### **Sidebar Articles:**

#### **Looking For A Few Haunted Castles In Ireland?**

##### **Huntington Castle**

Located in Clonegal, County Carlow, Huntington Castle is still occupied by decendants of Lord Esmonde. Although it has seen better days, the 17th century castle provides a perfectly eerie backdrop. If the two resident ghosts don't leave guests unsettled, the peculiar shrines constructed in the dungeon by Fellowship of Isis churchgoers, certainly will.

[www.fellowshipofisis.com](http://www.fellowshipofisis.com)  
[www.carlowtourism.com](http://www.carlowtourism.com)

##### **Leap Castle**

Considered the most haunted in Ireland, Leap Castle in County Tipperary also delivers one of the most ghastly tales. In the 1920s a bricked-in room was discovered behind the chapel...and inside the secret room, three cartloads of human remains.

[www.castles.org](http://www.castles.org)  
[www.hauntedcastlesandhotels.com](http://www.hauntedcastlesandhotels.com)

##### **Kinnitty Castle**

Now a comfortable hotel, Kinnitty Castle in County Offaly was once an Augustinian monastery. A monk from that era still roams the banquet hall. Clearly not maintaining a vow of silence, he has been known to talk to visitors and staff and has a reputation for providing surprisingly accurate predictions.

[www.kinnittycastle.com](http://www.kinnittycastle.com)

#### **Still haven't gotten enough haunted Ireland? Try these websites.**

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Featuring history and hauntings throughout Ireland, sites in the North, West, Central, East and South are highlighted..

[www.haunted-britain.com](http://www.haunted-britain.com)

##### **Irish Culture & Customs**

Includes stories of some of Ireland's creepiest castles and homes.

[www.irishcultureandcustoms.com](http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com)

**Haunted Hotel Guide**

You'll be hard-pressed to find a more complete guide to haunted accommodations in Ireland.

[www.hauntedhotelguide.com](http://www.hauntedhotelguide.com)

**Irish Ghosts & Folklore**

Featuring story after story of hauntings, traditions and Irish oddities.

[www.nzghosts.co.nz](http://www.nzghosts.co.nz)