



Why is the sister of JF Kennedy buried in Derbyshire?

(The Day John Fitzgerald Kennedy brought flowers from Ireland to lay on the grave of his sister Kathleen; buried in Derbyshire)

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Colour Pictures – credit Cormac Molumby



(L to R Eunice, JFK, Joe, Rosemary and Kathleen)

The few days in June 1963 when the first Irish- American President visited Ireland have gone down in history as a pivotal expression of Ireland’s place in the world; when a great –grandson of Irish immigrants became President of the United States of American. Following his visit to Ireland the President travelled on the 29th June to Waddington RAF base in Lincolnshire and from there travelled by helicopter to the little village of Edensor , Chatsworth; in the beautiful Peak District of Derbyshire . This was a well kept secret (more easily done in the sixties), so why this detour on route to meeting Prime Minister Harold Macmillan? The President came to visit the grave of his young sister who had died at the tender age of 28 .Kathleen (born February 20, 1920), known affectionally within the large Kennedy family as ‘Kick’ who had ‘come’ from the most famous Irish-American Dynasty to die in England as





the Marchioness of Hartington (May 13, 1948) and widow of the heir apparent to the Dukedom of Devonshire.

Kathleen had first come to London in 1938 with her charismatic clan as a vivacious teenager. Her father Joseph had been appointed U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.



(Joe Jr, Kathleen and JFK)

She quickly wowed British society, becoming one of its top debutantes. Back and forward to America before and during the World War II she eventually settled in London. Despite the opposition of her Catholic mother, on May 6th 1944 she married William Cavendish, Marquis of Hartington. He was an Anglican and the eldest son and heir apparent of the 10th Duke of Devonshire. Her eldest brother Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. was the only member of the Kennedy family to attend the ceremony.





(Kathleen's wedding with her eldest brother Joe Jnr in the background)

"She was not beautiful, but her vitality and charm were such that she was the one who drew attention in a crowd," wrote the 11th Duchess of Devonshire, Billy's sister-in-law Deborah, in her fascinating book 'Chatsworth the House.' "Her high spirits, funny Irish- American turn of phrase, so like her brother Jack's, and extreme good nature made her far more attractive than most pale English beauties. She was loved by everyone who knew her." Following the shocking death in World War II of both her beloved brother Joseph and husband within a month, a grieving Lady Kathleen after spending some time at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire with Billy's consoling family decided to return to London, where she bought a townhouse. While volunteering at a Red Cross fundraising dance in June 1946, she met a dashing man, another wealthy British aristocrat named Peter Fitzwilliam, the 8th Earl Fitzwilliam, whose family seat was Wentworth House, an amazing palace in South Yorkshire, with a room for each day of the year. He was also Protestant and, even worse, still married (separated from his wife) with an 11-year-old daughter. It was nearly love at first sight for the couple, but theirs was not a happy ending, either. Reportedly on their way to a romantic getaway in the South of France in May 1948, before planning to meet her father Joseph Kennedy in Paris to discuss their desire to





wed; their small, chartered plane crashed in stormy weather, instantly killing them. The Kennedy patriarch was the only family member to attend Lady Kathleen's London funeral Mass and later burial in Edensor. The Kennedy family archive is laced with tragedy and early deaths, JFK's only son also died in a plane crash.

On this warm British summers day in June 1963 the family was represented by the President of American, his sister in law Princess Lee Radziwill, Kathleen's sister Mrs Jean Smith (who later became Clinton's Ambassador to Ireland) and the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. They bowed their heads and President Kennedy laid the Irish harvested flowers, which he brought with him from Ireland, on the grave. Kathleen's epitaph reads- 'JOY SHE GAVE JOY SHE HAS FOUND' - with the acknowledgement that she was '*Widow of the Major Marquess Hartington killed in action and daughter of the Hon. Joseph Kennedy sometime Ambassador of the United States to Great Britain.*' With the added plaque on the ground stating '*In memory of John F Kennedy, president of the United States of American, who visited this grave on 29th June 1963*'



(Kathleen meeting with Mr and Mrs Churchill)



After lunch at Chatsworth House that afternoon President Kennedy left to continue his visit to London and his tragically short lived life as a world statesman; for he died five months later in Dallas, Texas.





About a mile away, is Chatsworth House, the gorgeous 297-room estate where, prior to her marriage, Kathleen had celebrated her 24th birthday. Each year, some half-million people visit Chatsworth House, which for nearly five centuries has been the Cavendish family home. Currently, the 12th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and their family reside there. House, gardens, tea shops, farm shop, garden centre and walks are well worth a visit.



Gerry Molumby

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