

# Some Georgian Architecture in Town and Country

(A paper read at the Bishop's Palace, 29/4/62)

BY MRS. ADRIAN BLIGH

Mrs. Bligh said — Kilkenny has ample examples of Georgian architecture in our county towns, notably, Thomastown, Ballyragget, Castlecomer and Durrow — Durrow is not in the county but is still in the Diocese of Ossory. The most pleasing Georgian shop-front is O'Reilly's in Thomastown just opposite the church. We are speaking of a period from the accession of George I, in 1714, to the death of George IV in 1830.

Brick and stone were the materials used. Brick seems to have been used where stone was scarce. Some of the earlier houses were built of brick and we must remember that brick building had reached its zenith in England during the time of Christopher Wren (1632 — 1723). Sometimes the bricks were imported but this was costly, sometimes they were made locally, by Huguonot refugees.

## BRICK WORKS AT ATTANAGH.

I know there was a brick works at Attanagh but do not know the dates of this factory. Stone was used in most of our houses and our own local limestone was very suitable and very lovely. Tighe, in his survey, says the Black Quarry was best for this purpose.

I would like to draw attention to some of our Georgian houses in the county. The foremost is *Castletown Cox* which ranks among half a dozen of the most beautiful houses in Ireland. Maurice Craig places it high in that half dozen. It was built in 1765 for Archbishop Cox of Cashel (he had previously been Bishop of Ossory) and was designed by Davis Ducat, a Sardinian Canal engineer. The garden side of the house is Kilkenny blue limestone while the entrance front is contrasted with dressed sandstone.

*Desart Court*, built in 1733 (the architect is not known) is

now a ruin. This family was in Ireland before Cromwell came one Joseph Cuffe had distinguished himself in the service of the Protector and obtained lands here. There is much about the life of the Cuffes in the 18th century in Dorothea Herbert's retrospections. For an account of the Hon. Ottway Cuffe, I refer you to Mr. J. L. McAdams booklet while Hubert Butler has an interesting account of his life published in the Dublin Magazine in 1948.

*Bessborough* or *Betzborough* was designed by Francis Binden, the Limerick man in 1744, *Woodstock* is also Francis Binden's work built about 1735 for Sir William Fownes, ancestor of the Tighe family and it remained the seat of the Tighes until 1922 when it, together with its splendid library was burned in the Civil War. It had a rare collection of trees.

*Castlemorris* is also considered Francis Binden's work. It was built in 1751. *Mount Juliet* was built about 1780 for the Earl of Carrick. I have a date of 1716 for the erection of *Ballyconra*. *Birchfield* and *Kilcreene* (now the Orthopaedic Hospital) are, from the outside, very similar to each other. We have the family houses of the Floods—*Farmly* and *Flood Hall*. *Westcourt*—built for Lord Callan—and afterwards the home of the Gregory's.

*Kilfane*, I must mention as being the home of the Power brothers — John who started the Kilkenny Hunt and Richard who founded the Kilkenny Theatre. *Kilmurry* was the home of Kendal Bushe, the famous barrister known as the Incorruptible Irishman and Nancy Crompton, his wife. All these demesnes were planted with trees and shrubs and the owners vied with each other in getting trees from various parts of the world. The Botanical Gardens were established in 1796 and this helped to increase interest in landscaping.

### SOME FINE DOORWAYS

I would like to draw attention to some Georgian buildings in Kilkenny. Patrick Street has many fine buildings on either side of the street. *Mr. O'Neill's* and *Mrs. Crotty's* have fine doorways and windows with cut stone facing. These windows are very similar to those in the town hall. The house of O'Neill's seems to have got a Georgian face-lift, having Tudor windows in the basement and a Tudor chimney.



On the other side of the street are two fine doorways with very pleasing floral ornamentation. One was formerly *Hackett's* and is now an insurance office; the *County Club* is the other. Both these doorways, unfortunately, have been painted over. *Butler House* has a porch over the door with classical pillars. Walking down the other side of the street the Club House retains its balconies and lovely arched ceiling in its yard.

Further down we have some nice ironwork, railings and lampholder and what is very lovely, indeed, is the knocker on the door of *Mr. William Kenealy's*. The Bishop's town house has a nice knocker too, but not as nice as this one. Commencing on the top of the Castle Road we have a fine example of the classical in *Switzer's Hospital*, built in 1803. Down the Parade—what used to be called Castle Street—the houses are all worth noticing. On a lesser scale the houses in Wellington Square are graceful with their recessed curved doorways and from the back can be seen these round headed windows as one walks down Garden Row. William Street also has some pleasing houses.

#### MANY GEORGIAN FRONTS

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High Street has many Georgian fronts. *Murphy's* of the Woollen Hall has the base of a Tudor chimney on the roof as also have *Bibby's* and *Miss Doherty's*. *Smithwick's* is a typical Georgian town house and it has some interesting shutters. About a year ago we lost, perhaps the quaintest window in Kilkenny—formerly *Hackett's* and now *Mrs. O'Connor's* (77 High St.).

After dealing with houses in John Street and John's Quay, Mrs. Bligh said — We have no architect for the *Tholsel* but traditionally it is said to be Italian. In Parliament Street we have the *Courthouse* and former jail. The arches of the ground floor loggia have unfortunately been locked up and external staircases were added by William Robertson early in the last century. The old guards' barracks in Parliament Street is a fine building.

*Kilkenny College* has a pleasing aspect in a beautiful setting by the Nore. The present building dates from 1782 and has the finest example in Kilkenny of a fan light. The finest example of a Georgian shop-window is that of *Apparelle* in Irish-town. This, by the way, was the old Archdekin House.

As regards bridges the six-arched Greensbridge was designed

by G. Smith. Like the bridges at Ballyragget, Bennettsbridge, Inistioge and Thomastown it was built after the great flood of 1764 which swept most of the bridges on the Nore between Durrow and New Ross away.

When *Richard Ledrede* was appointed to the See of Ossory in 1318 there was no palace near the cathedral in which to reside. Up to that time we read of different episcopal manors at Bishopslough, in the parish of Tullagherin. In 1244 *Geoffrey of Turville* purchased for his See the manor of Dorogh and built an episcopal residence there. *Geoffrey St. Leger* succeeded in 1260 and he founded and was a generous benefactor of the College of Vicar Choral.

He gave to them his manse and lodgings. These were Common Hall and other buildings and was the palace and place of residence of the bishop before the palaces of Aghour and Dorogh were erected.

### THREE CHURCHES DEMOLISHED

About the end of 1354 Bishop Ledrede obtained permission from King Edward II to demolish three churches outside the walls of the palace. Hogan gives the names as St. Nicholas's, St. Brigid's, near the Cathedral, and St. James's. The stones were employed in building an episcopal palace near the Cathedral in which Bishop Ledrede erected an altar to the three saints whose churches he had demolished and obliged the Collegiate Vicars to celebrate service there whenever the Bishop should require them.

Records of the history of the Palace are scanty and may be summarised as follows:— Bishop Richard Ledrede (1318-1366) erected the first building of moderate size. Bishop Griffith Williams (1641-1672) found it in ruins on his return in 1642. Bishop John Parry (1672-1677) improved it. Bishop Charles Este (1735-1741) made additions and renovations.

Architecturally the building is in three parts, viz., the front of the main house (probably built by Bishop Griffith Williams), the addition containing the diningroom, drawing-room and staircase (probably Bishop Este or somewhat later) and two wings added at a very much later period and in poor repair. Ware's Bishop's, 1764, contains an engraving of the Cathedral and the Bishop's Palace dated



1739. The palace is shown as having a high pitched roof and containing two main storeys, in addition to an attic floor with dormer windows; at some later date the front facade was altered to give a somewhat Georgian appearance and with three full storeys.

### LARGE ENTRANCE HALL

The oldest portion contains on the ground floor a large entrance hall, breakfast room, stone floored utility room (the "Pillar Room") measuring 25' x 19'; cloakroom, and one large and three small semi-basement rooms used as boiler-rooms, cellars, etc. The first floor contains the library, 26' x 20'; a medium sized sittingroom, and a bathroom. On the third floor are six bedrooms, all of reasonable size, and a bathroom.

The second portion contains the staircase to all floors, the diningroom, 39' x 21', on the ground floor, and the drawingroom, of the same size, on the first floor.

The main architectural features are the magnificent staircase and the valuted ceilings in the "Pillar Room," sittingroom and cellars on the ground floor of the oldest portion. The diningroom and drawingroom are also fine rooms. The front facade is pleasant but of no particular architectural merit, while the rear aspect, consisting as it does of a two-storey building added to one of three storeys, has little to commend it.

### DESIGNED THE WHITE HOUSE

Referring to Georgian buildings, I would like to mention James Hoban, architect, who designed the White House in Washington. Born at Desart, Cuffesgrange, he was son of Edward Hoban and Martha Bayne. He was instructed in drawing by Thomas Ivory of the Royal Dublin Society, and was awarded second prize for drawing in 1780. He was concerned with the Royal Exchange and the Custom House, Dublin, in 1781.

He left for Philadelphia in or before 1785. He designed the President's House in Washington, which was built between 1792 and 1799, and closely followed the plans of Leinster House. The United States Congress had offered

an award of £500 or a gold medal for the design, but Hoban accepted the medal. He was appointed to supervise its construction.

When the invading British burned it in 1814, James Hoban planned its restoration. The White House is a two-storey building of Virginian freestone, painted white to hide the marks of fire. It is simple, but dignified.

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## Dr. Richard Pococke

*Dr. Richard Pococke*, an Englishman, an oriental scholar and a traveller of immense energy, became bishop of Ossory in 1756. Nine years later he was transferred to Meath where he soon died after a very brief illness. In the time of his episcopate in Ossory he did work of immense importance and lasting effect. One share of his energies went to the renovation of the Cathedral Church, still almost in the ruins to which Cromwell had reduced it. More of his time was devoted to the founding of a linen weaving school. This he established to help Catholic boys whose wretched and miserable condition caused him great distress. Frequently in his papers he comments on the pleasure places gave him that had "a face of industry."

### ST. CANICE'S CATHEDRAL

As Bishop of Ossory Dr. Pococke's great work was the restoration of the cathedral which had suffered so much during the centuries since its foundation, and which had endured its most devastating destruction at the hands of Cromwell and his Roundheads. Its desolation was described in 1660 by Bishop Williams who referred to "the fanatick limbs of the beast" responsible for the "beheading" of many of the churches in the diocese, some of which were left without roofs, "even the timber being quite torn off". St. Canice's was "utterly defaced", its roof thrown down, its goodly bells removed, its doors and windows shattered "so that hogs might come and root". Further damage was done by the Anabaptists who arrived with hammers and hatchets "to break up the benches, and do other unseemly abuses besides".

This gives some idea of the magnitude of the task to be done — more than a full century after the Cromwellian