

Butler House

Margaret Phelan

This fine house, at the top of Patrick Street, was bought by the writer's father, Richard Duggan, in 1922 from Rebecca Greene James, widow of Dr. James. The house had been the property of that family, probably, for the preceding forty years. One Joseph Lawson was in residence earlier still, the Butler family having previously relinquished it.

About 1770 the house had been redecorated and restored by Walter, 16th Earl of Ormonde, as a dower house for his widow Eleanor (nee Morris). As such it may have sheltered from time to time his famous daughter, Lady Eleanor Butler, one of the "Ladies of Llangollen". In 1634, when James 12th Earl (later First Duke) vacated the castle for the visit of Lord Deputy Thomas Wentworth, he and his household may have occupied Butler House. Certainly it is older than 18th century. The Earl of Arran's house, beside John's Bridge, has perhaps equally a right to claim the temporary dwelling of the castle family.

Butler House is particularly attractive from the garden front; there it displays the fine apses which adorn the main rooms, three storeys of them. These have fine plaster work, Adams in design, and boast good contemporary marble mantelpieces, that in the dining room having a panel showing Narcissus falling in love with his own reflection. The entrance hall and the main staircase have recurring panels of decorative plaster work designs, showing the four seasons. These are enclosed in medallions, swags and true lovers' knots.

Butler House was bought for £800 in 1922 but the Masonic Lodge 642, then in residence in part of it, had to be additionally compensated for removal.

The Duggan occupancy continued till the death of the writer's mother, Henrietta Duggan, in 1955. Then it was bought by Dr. Harry Roche, who lived next door, and whose premises are now included in the general building. Kilkenny Design Workshop acquired the property about 1970 and restored it as a school for graduate designers and as a reception area. The restoration is excellent, combining modernity with comfort. The Duggan restoration had been traditional and included the repair of the mantelpieces by James Kealy, marble worker from Colles Mill at Maddoxtown, and decoration by Patrick O'Carroll, High Street, whose sons are carrying on that firm. The carpets and curtains were made by the Dun Emer Guild in Dublin (Miss Gleeson in charge) and reflected the Adam design on wall and ceiling.