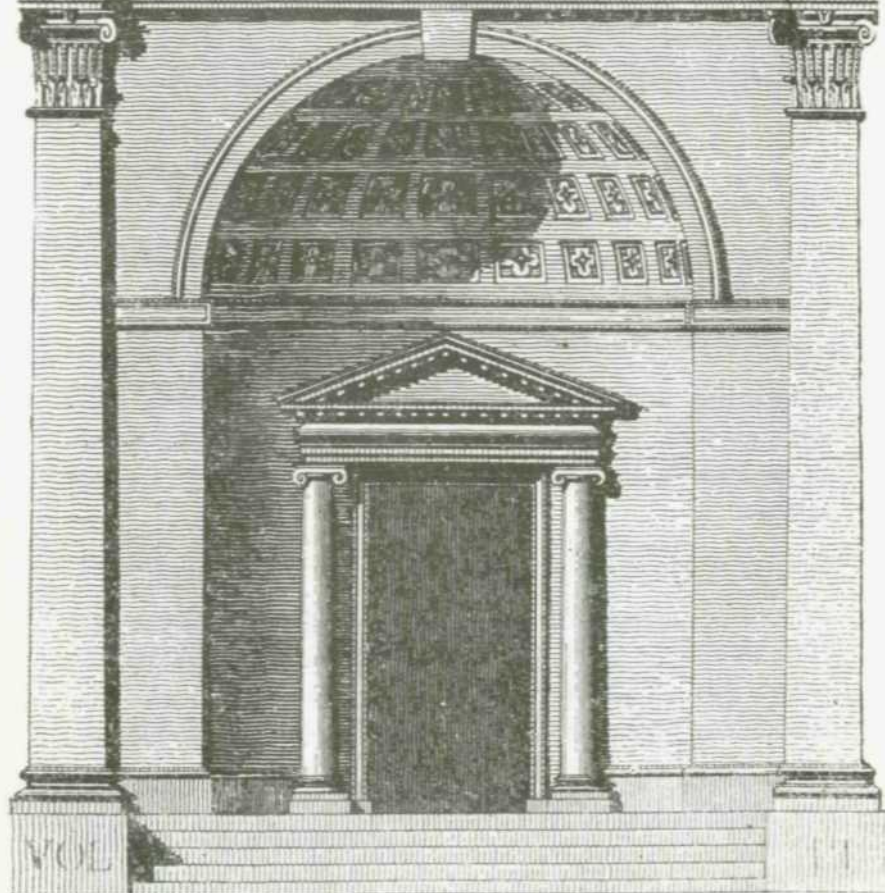


IRISH  
GEORGIAN SOCIETY

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APRIL MAY JUNE



QUARTERLY BULLETIN OF THE  
IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

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*Drawings by* Neil Keatinge, Mark Bence-Jones & Delmonte.

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## THE TAILOR'S HALL, BACK LANE

WILLIAM A. DILLON

THE only surviving Guild Hall in Dublin stands today sadly neglected in Back Lane Street, close by Christchurch Cathedral. The Guilds **were** responsible for the organisation of the trades and industries of Dublin throughout the Georgian period. They not **only** benevolently regulated conditions of work, but maintained the quality of their crafts, as well as exercising a strict monopoly of their various trades. The Guild of Tailors owned a hall since 1583, and the earliest one was probably in Back Lane, whilst the hall that now occupies Back Lane Street was erected in 1706. The Georgian

Society Record (VOL. 4) is inaccurate in declaring that the premises are of Jacobean construction, and that they were of old known as Kildare Hall, occupied by the Jesuit order, but subsequently used as a Hall based on the University of Dublin. In fact, the evidence of the records of the Tailors' Guild show these rooms to have been built in 1706. Though for some time previously the Tailors appear to have owned a building and grounds in Back Lane (possibly the Jesuit premises) on part of which was erected a new Hall at the outset of the eighteenth century.

Sir John Gilbert (who wrote his *History of Dublin* in the 1850's) had a copy made of the old account book of the Tailor's Guild, and it shows that the cornerstone of the Hall was laid in 1704 at the cost of eighteen shillings and sixpence. *Four new oak tables for the Hall* are entered in the account book for 1805 at £4, and Dutch tiles for the Hall, parlour and Council Chamber in the same year amounted to only £1.14.6. The entrance to the Hall was through an iron gate over which was an inscription declaring that the building was erected for the corporation of Tailors in 1706. The building must have boasted an exceedingly fine interior in the eighteenth century, and until the Musick Hall of Fishamble Street was built in 1741, the Tailors had the largest public room in Dublin. At the west end of the Assembly Hall was a carved wooden screen which Maurice Craig suggests was a renovated *reredos* from an extinct church. A canopy and throne for the Master was erected there also, and above it was placed a clock, and the crest of the Corporation carved into the back of the throne. The Queen Anne staircase, with its fine barley sugar balusters, and the delicately curved balcony with its wrought iron railings were handsome additions to the delights of the Hall. Christopher Neary, Master, gave a veined white marble chimney piece, which was inscribed: *the gift of Christopher Neary, Master, Alexander Bell and Hugh Craig, Wardens 1784.*

Certainly, the tailors and their guild were not lacking in



good taste. Among their treasures they had a handsome collection of paintings. These included a painting of St. **Homon**, a tailor of Cremona, who gave all his labour to the poor. The boardroom had portraits of King Charles **I** and **II** and William **III**, with one of Swift; in the hall hung one of George **I**. In addition there was a carving of Adam and Eve, and a bust of George **IV**, presented in **1802**, when he was Prince of Wales, by Alexander Bell. An auction of some of the items in **1842** mentions a few portraits by Van Dyck.

Such desirable surroundings made these commodious premises much sought after for assemblies as well as fashionable parties, and they were let to many societies. In **1746** the Dublin **Musical** Society paid five shillings for the Hall, and it was also used regularly by the Barbers', Saddlers' and Hosiers' Guild. The owners were to find by experience that **lett**-ings to *fencing and dancing masters* as well as for theatrical purposes were injurious to the premises and accordingly in **1785** all such tenancies were prohibited.

The Corporation of Dublin were often accommodated with the use of the Hall prior to **1791**. Perhaps the most fascinating occupiers were the United Irishmen, who, in **1793**, through Oliver Bond (later sentenced to **death**), paid nine pounds for a half year's tenancy. The Catholic Committee also used the rooms for sundry meetings and it was because they met there that the Hall was nicknamed the 'Back Lane Parliament'. In the **1798** rising it was handed over for the use of the **military**. Between **1834** and **1839** bodies ranging from the **Williamite** Society to the Amicable Vocalists Society are to be found holding their meetings under its roof. In fact the varied history of the Hall, and all its past associations, make it at times almost a miniature museum of Dublin's History.

The Guild, threatened with dissolution under the Municipal Corporations Act of **1841**, realised their movable goods and chattels, and sold their paintings and some silver pieces. The Hall became the Tailor's Endowed School for Protestant boys. In **1873**, escaping a future as a **distillery**, it was used

for some temperance **meetings**, Sunday Schools, and as a workmen's **reading** and coffee room. In **1960** it is owned by the Dublin Corporation, and let to the Legion of Mary, who **are moving out** in May because the building is dangerous.

Perhaps there is no building in Dublin which has been through such **changes**, and enacted such a history behind its walls, and yet suffered less alteration than this great monument to the taste and enlightenment of the Guilds of past centuries. Within a decade this Guildhall may be beyond repair, unless it is restored in the immediate future. It would be a sorrowful **thing** to see this **fine** home of the Guild of Tailors collapse, **and** with it disappear the memories of two hundred and fifty years of Dublin's History. Like Burke we may only say that a nation that does not look backwards to its **history**, cannot hope to look forward to posterity.



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c. MAXWELL: Dublin under the Georges.



## GROVE

### WILLIAM TINSLEY: VICTORIAN OR GEORGIAN?

MARK BENICE-JONES

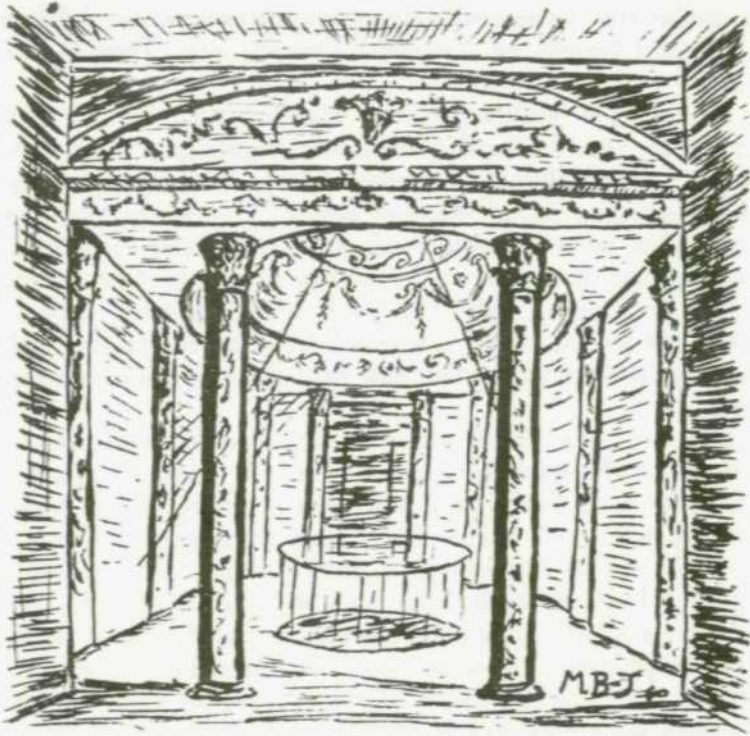
IF one thinks of convenience, ease of manner and the competent handling of space, the peak of Georgian **architecture** would be nearer **1800** than **1700**. In Ireland, later still. Francis Johnston, who flourished at the time of the Union, ranks with the highest. He was the first of a school of early nineteenth century Irish architects, the last of whom was William Tinsley. These **architects**, who included **the** Morrisons and the Pains, maintained the eclecticism of James VVyatt, **equally** happy in Classical or Gothick, both of which were **Georgian**, at a time when Englishmen were rigidly **committed** either to the Neo-Grecianism of **Smirke**, or to the scholarly Gothic of Pugin and Salvin, who were younger and older contemporaries of Tinsley, born in **1804**. Thus Tinsley was the last of the Georgians. But he lived until **1885**, having emigrated to America in **1851**; and on the other side of the Atlantic he underwent a change. Mr. John D. Forbes's book on

Tinsley is **called** *Victorian Architect* and he **describes** him as "a Victorian among **Victorians**". Certainly, most of **Tinsley's** American buildings belong to another generation. This is remarkable in that, if Irish Architecture in the early nineteenth century was **twenty-five** years **behind** England, that of America was more like fifty. But the period of **Tinsley's emigration** seems to mark the moment when American architecture, **from** being old-fashioned, suddenly became *avant-garde*.

William Tinsley lived at Clonmel and practised in **Tippcrary** and Waterford; a part of Ireland combining great natural beauty with, in the years before the Famine, considerable **wealth**. It was the time of Bianconi's Long Cars, of the hunting exploits of the third Marquess of Waterford, of the young Anthony **Trollope's** work in the postal service. Building was cheap and many people could afford to build. Tinsley started work in his family's building business and received a sketchy architectural education in Clonmel, though later he worked with the Pains who themselves were pupils of Nash. As a young man, he built a lodge for Lord Gough at Rathronan which, in 1854, was the scene of the famous Arbuthnot Abduction. He also enlarged Knockevan, for **Richard** Pennefather whose cousin, William, commissioned him in **1831** to build his first major country house, Lakfield near Fethard. It is plain and dignified with a single storey Doric portico; and a roof with **overhanging** eaves which although described as in the Italian villa style seems more **likely** to **be** a concession to Irish rain, such roofs being very common on the smaller eighteenth century country houses. In **1833** **he** built the handsome Classical entrance to Marlfield, for John Bagwell. In the same year he built his first Gothic house, **Rockwell**, near Cashel, for William Roc; and he did **some** improvements at Comcragh House, County Waterford, for Colonel **Wray** Palliser.

From **1835** to **1838** he built his most ambitious Gothic house, **Tulalmain** Castle, near Fethard, for John Maher





## THE ROTUNDA AT GROVE

which now belongs to the Hon. Mrs. Jackson. Tullamainc is very much an eighteenth century castle; built, as the Puginists would have said, without a proper understanding of Gothic forms; and all the more charming for that. It has large, regularly disposed windows, brittle, sugary castellations and a garden wall like an artificial ruin. Tullamainc bears some resemblance to its earlier and grander neighbours Shanbally and Alitchelstown by Nash and the Pains respectively; but it is far more primitive as regards picturesque grouping. Like Wyatt, Tinsley was never really at home with the Gothic. For the romantic country house he seemed

to prefer the *cottage orné* style, like his own house, Adelaide Cottage, Clonmel, or Turtulla, Thurles, now Thurles Golf Club.

About 1836 William Barton commissioned him to work at Grove, near Fethard, which was originally a plain eighteenth century house, a centre block with lower wings, facing across a broad wooded valley. The centre block has since been extended westwards, so that the two main fronts face up and down the valley instead of across. The old east front, unchanged, faces the yard; the eighteenth century wings are joined to the new block by short connecting links curving backwards, so that the west front remains symmetrical.

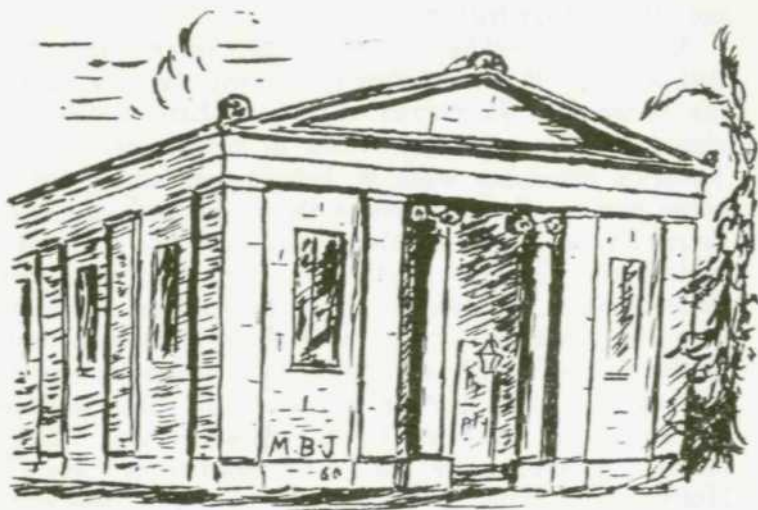
It is not certain how much Tinsley actually did at Grove, other than the Ionic portico on the north front, two bridges across the river in the park and the remodelling of the wings. But the new block is very like Lakefield; moreover, the portico does not look as though it were added to an older building, but both seem to have been designed together. Thus Tinsley may well have been responsible for the whole of the western extension; in which case he shows himself to have been as skilful as Repton in relating a house to its landscape: the principal rooms in the south front have a view of exceptional beauty, along the river towards Slievenamon and the distant towers of Kiltinan Castle, which might have been specially built as an "eye catcher".

The interior of Grove is equally successful. The main rooms lie on three sides of a long central staircase hall, lit by a dome with a delightful little rotunda of wooden Doric columns painted Siena. Below is a rather Soane-like vault carried by larger columns. The dining room has an alcove at each end in which are sideboards that are probably original. The library is decorated with Classical reliefs. Whereas Lakefield and Tullamaine have both changed hands and the latter was rebuilt after being burnt in the Trouble, Grove is unaltered and remains in the same family, the present owner, Mr. H.J. Ponsonby, having inherited it from his cousin,

**the** late Captain Barton.

Apart from building a number of churches and chapels, first with the Pains and then by himself, the most outstanding of which is the former **Wesleyan** Chapel in **Clonmel**, a chaste Ionic temple very much in the manner of Soane, Tinsley's remaining work in Ireland was largely for two noble patrons. For the first of these, the Earl of Glengall, he rebuilt the town of Cahir. As Tinsley left it, Cahir is a typical Irish Georgian small town; with plain, well-proportioned houses, ornamented either by Classical entablatures over the windows, or by the familiar eighteenth century Gothick "**label**". He also built other houses on the Cahir estate and restored parts of the old Castle. One wonders if this might not have led to his replacing Lord Glengalls' rather dull house at the end of the main street (now Cahir House Hotel), **either** by **making** the old Castle habitable, or by building a new house for him in the park. But the prospect of a Tinsley country house of the first importance was knocked into the **might-have-beens** by the Famine, which drove Lord Glengall into the F.ncumbered Estates Court. And it may have been more than the Famine which ruined him; for his wife was a millionairess in her own right. Mr. Forbes follows the Halls in describing Lord Glengall as an excellent resident landlord; **yet** his name figures in a list of candidates for Court appointments whom the Prince Consort turned down because they were "Dandies and Roués of London and the Turf".

Tinsley's other noble patron was the third Marquess of Waterford. As **well** as building the Curraghmore farmyard, a church on the estate and a police barracks at Portlaw, he completed the forecourt of the house and probably added some decoration to the **façade**. In Lady Waterford, Tinsley had a patron of real taste, a talented artist in touch with the world of fashion. She was Louisa, one of the two beautiful daughters of Lord Stuart de Rothesay, who was himself an amateur architect, the creator of **Highcliffe**. She though the outside of the house was ugly; and it is likely that she and



FORMER WESLEYAN CHAPEL AT CLONMEL

Tinsley worked together on plans for beautifying it with Italianate trimmings. It was probably she who introduced him to the Italianate style which Barry was making popular in **England**; for Tinsley's adoption of it, his first real departure from **the Georgian**, dates from his work at **Curraghmore**; and his first Italianate house was just nearby, **Mayfield, Portlaw**, which he rebuilt for Colonel **Malcolmson**. The **Mayfield** theme was repeated in several American college buildings; it consists of a central tower with lower wings on either side. Perhaps this composition was inspired by **Curraghmore** itself, where the old castle juts out from the centre of the front, which is balanced by two lower eighteenth century wings and the vast forecourt based on **Seton Delaval**.

In **1851**, owing to the depression in Ireland, Tinsley and his large family emigrated to America. It is significant that he left these islands in the year of the **Great Exhibition**, which marked the flood tide of **Victorianism**. But when he



settled down in Cincinnati and Indianapolis, it was not as a conservative continuing a by-gone style in the back woods, though that is just what his Middle West clients first wanted, as he found to his cost. And having ceased to be a Georgian, he did not enter the next logical phase in the development of architecture, that of the revivalists. Apart from his few Italianate buildings, he never, like Salvin, went in for the exact reproduction of an archaic style. Instead, he quickly absorbed all the most up-to-date ideas from England and Western Europe. Before the end of the 'Fifties he had built several formidable Gothic colleges which anticipate Christ Church **Meadow** Buildings. He built virile if somewhat sour churches, which might be by **Butterfield** or Street, "the Gospel for the Slums" with a **vengeance**— and indeed, Tinsley was himself a **stern** Methodist, entirely Victorian in the austerity of his life. His architecture culminated with, in **1859**, the Henry Probasco House at Cincinnati, a frightening confection of Romanesque *motifs* which is just the sort of house the word Victorian conjures up, variations of which can be seen in the suburbs of every British industrial town; and in **1869**, the Institution for the Blind at Columbus, which has mansard roofs and might be a London hotel built in the **1900's**.

And yet, for all these strange developments, one can still see the Georgian ghost. Apart from the Probasco house, his American buildings are symmetrical: a centre block with wings or pavilions, the favourite Palladian plan. His very last work, the **Knox** County **Infirmiry**, has a double curved outside staircase leading up to the first floor, which is thus treated as the *piano nobile*; another **long-discarded** Palladian feature. And his Madison University Hall of **1858** (unfortunately much altered) was a surprising return to Adam, with a **semi-circular** portico as at Luton Hoo, raised on a rusticated basement; not particularly successful, but quite different from the **Neo-Classical** building which one would have expected at this date. It is more like Colonial Georgian, with a

faint resemblance to Government House, Calcutta.

Tinsley's later work may be ugly, yet this does not detract from his talent. He was never a mere antiquarian. Either he worked in the eighteenth century idiom in which he had grown up, or he ventured out with the most daring of the Victorians. Thus his architecture is always alive.



## IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY OUTING

Friday 29th April

6 p.m. Meet at **Marsh's** Library  
(Near St. Patrick's Cathedral)

Talk by Dr. R. B. MacDowell, Librarian

Proceed to Tailor's Hall  
**Talk by W. Dillon Esq.**

Proceed to Marshalsea  
Talk by Eoin **O'Mahony Esq., O.M.**



Members of the Irish Georgian Society will be especially welcome at an

### *Organ & Cello Recital*

on the original 18th

Century organ in St. Werburgh's Church, Thomas St. Dublin on Friday, April 29th at 8 p.m. The programme will include works by Bach and Mozart.



## RUSSBOROUGH

BLESSINGTON, CO. WICKLOW

THE building of Russborough was started in 1741 by Joseph Leeson, and was finished in about 1750. He was the son of a Dublin brewer, and was created Earl of Milltown in 1763. A great patron of the arts, he spent much of his time in both Prussia and Rome. Richard Cassells (1690-1751) the German architect, who was known in Ireland as Richard Castle, collaborated with Francis Bindon in designing the house. Castle was also the architect of many important buildings in Dublin, including the Rotunda Hospital and Leinster House; among his country houses were Powerscourt, Carton, **Hazle-**wood, and Bellinter.

Russborough is built of granite from the Golden Hill quarry close by, in the form of a central block and wings connected by curved colonnades of the Doric order. In the colonnades are niches with statues of pagan divinities, and on the balustrade on each side of the broad flight of granite steps in front are large lions carved in stone supporting shields.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Russborough is its symmetry, both inside and out, and the perfect classical proportions of the rooms. The **plaster** ceilings on the ground floor are amazingly varied and imaginative. It is more than

likely that one of the Francini brothers designed the **ceiling** in the Red Velvet Saloon, because the cornice is similar to that of the Saloon at Carton (1739), known to be by the Italian Stuccodores. It is not known who designed the fantastic plasterwork on the staircase walls, where some of the modelling is distinctly amateurish. Dr. C. P. Curran, in the Journal of the R.S.A.I. for 1940, quotes Mr. Sibthorpe as having described it as "The ravings of a maniac" adding that he was "afraid the madman was Irish."

An unusual feature is the mahogany dado which follows through nearly all the ground floor rooms, matching the beautiful doors, of wood imported from the West Indies. Of all the finely patterned floors, the one in the Red Velvet Saloon is particularly beautiful with its sycamore inlay. The mantelpieces in the Front Hall, South Drawing Room, and Dining Room are magnificent in proportion and architectural in design. Except for the black Kilkenny marble in the front hall, the marble used in the other mantelpieces was imported from Italy, with plaques incorporating classical and legendary themes.

The terraces on the northern slopes, behind the **house**, with their man-made lake, are reputed to have cost £30,000 and were all excavated by hand at a time when labour was plentiful and wages low. These terraces seem to be the skeleton of a vast classical **garden** which was never completed. The southern view over the Wicklow mountains was made more beautiful when the River **Liffey** was damned in 1938 to form the Poulaphouca reservoir.

An unusual opportunity of seeing **Russborough** will occur on Saturday, 11th June, when conducted tours of the house are being arranged from 2-5 p.m., during the Russborough Fête.