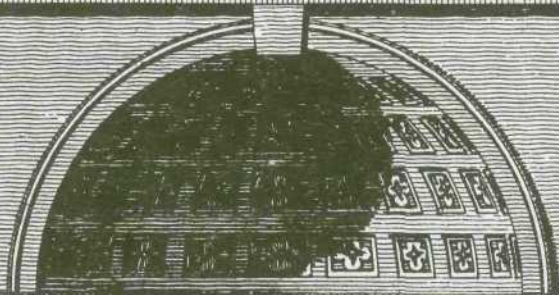


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The cover is a design by Gandon from his version (VOL V) of Vitruvius Britannicus, 1771.

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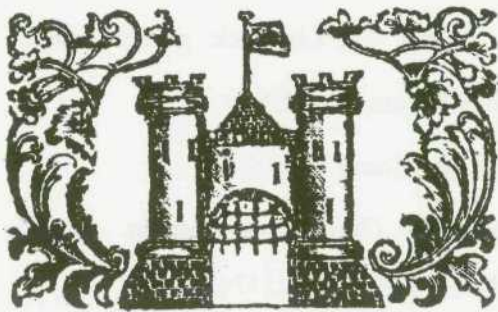
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# GEORGIAN LIMERICK



BY

*The Knight of Glin*



## LIST OF PLATES

- A—The Customs House, Limerick.
- B—Shannongrove, Co. Limerick.
- C—Shannongrove, the staircase.
- D—Glin Castle, Co. Limerick, entrance.
- E—Glin Castle, Co. Limerick, garden front.
- F—Mount levers, Co. Clare.
- G—Mural at Mount levers.
- H—Kilnasoola Church—monument to Sir Donatus  
O'Brien by Kidwell (1740).
- I—Carnelly, Co. Clare.
- J—New Hall, Co. Clare.
- K—Organ case at New Hall.

Georgian Limerick dates from 1760, when the government declared the city to be no longer a fortress. The walls of the old town were torn down, together with many of the old houses. A bridge was built in 1761 from the old town to the Pery lands which form the main part of the present city which is known as Newtown. The Right Hon. Sexten Pery (later Viscount Pery and speaker of the Irish House of Commons), the proprietor, laid out the streets in 1769 probably using Davis Duchart as town planner, though we only know for certain that Duchart designed the Customs House, completed in that year. Many of the houses, blocks and squares were built much later, presumably to a master plan now lost.

The main reason for this new expansion was that the Smyth Prendergast Vereker clan was so corrupt and autocratic that it refused to grant the freedom of the city and the franchise to merchants and citizens who would not vote for it. Pery then started his 'new town' backed by the Independent Citizens, leaving the old clique to themselves.<sup>1</sup> The streets, to quote a local history, in a few years were to be filled with elegant dwellings and substantial stores and warehouses, occupied by an active, industrious and, were they enabled to avail themselves of all the advantages of their happy situation, we might add, a highly prosperous population.<sup>27</sup>

Limerick at the end of the 18th century was a busy place; a typical county town with its grand juries, courts, assemblies and social entertainments. It saw the volunteers and viceregal visits. Sir Vere Hunt of Curragh Chase started a theatre in which the local nobility and gentry disported themselves on the boards. English regiments provided eligible young men for scheming mothers of local county families. On the 27th of April 1786 the Limerick citizens saw the indomitable Richard Crosbie ascend in an elegant balloon, and after travelling over the neighbouring counties, descend the same evening 'to the great terror of the country people who fled with affright from the supposed supernatural visitants . . . .'<sup>28</sup>



Building continued in Newtown **Pery** and fine blocks of rose-brick houses with pedimented or fanlighted doors were seen '*springing up . . . amidst green fields and waving corn.*' Pery Square, which was only partially built, dates from the 1840's. Today many of these fine rows of houses have followed the usual path to the Irish house breaker. Where once the wives of the local merchants watched from the high glazed windows of Arthurs' Quay for the return of their husbands' ships, now there is a concrete car-park, and the once gay rooms of the Assembly House are today a pile of rubble.

However, **O'Connell** Street and its Crescent, Patrick St. with Mr. Bruce the banker's door, and St. Johns Sq., still show the pure lines and pleasing symmetry of a Georgian county town.

#### THE CUSTOMS HOUSE

Designed by Davis Duchart, the Sardinian, architect of Kilshannig and Castletown (Cox), it was started in June 1765, and Farrar in his first history of Limerick (1766) writes, 'we hope to see the main building Roofed in a few months, it has already cost the Commissioners of Revenue £5,000, and 'till the whole is completed 'tis difficult to ascertain the total expense.'<sup>5</sup> It was finished in 1769 costing £8,000. With its cut stone arcaded wings, Corinthian pilasters and heavy entablature, it forms the finest building in Limerick. 'When strangers land here,' Farrar continues, 'it cannot fail of making a seasonable Impression on them, of the Rise and Grandeur of this City.'<sup>6</sup>

#### THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE

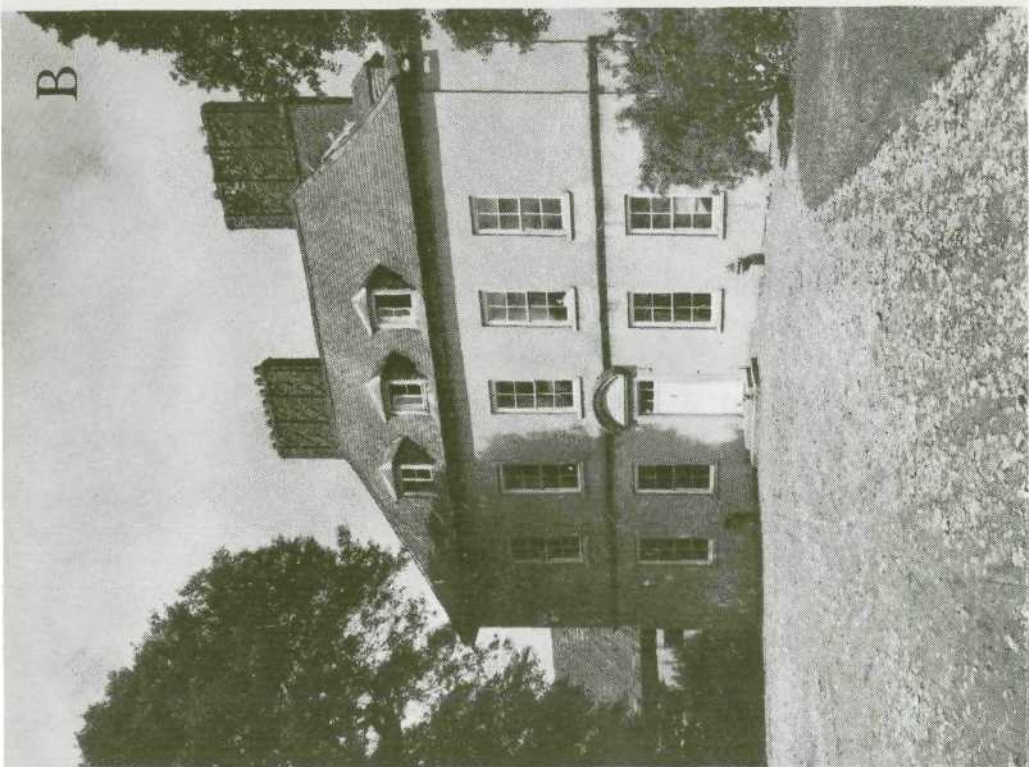
Designed by Hannan who also built Grange for the Croker family (now dismantled). The Court House was finished in 1810 costing £12,000.<sup>7</sup> It forms a somewhat clumsy essay in Roman Doric made clumsier by the recent replacement of a flat roof.

A

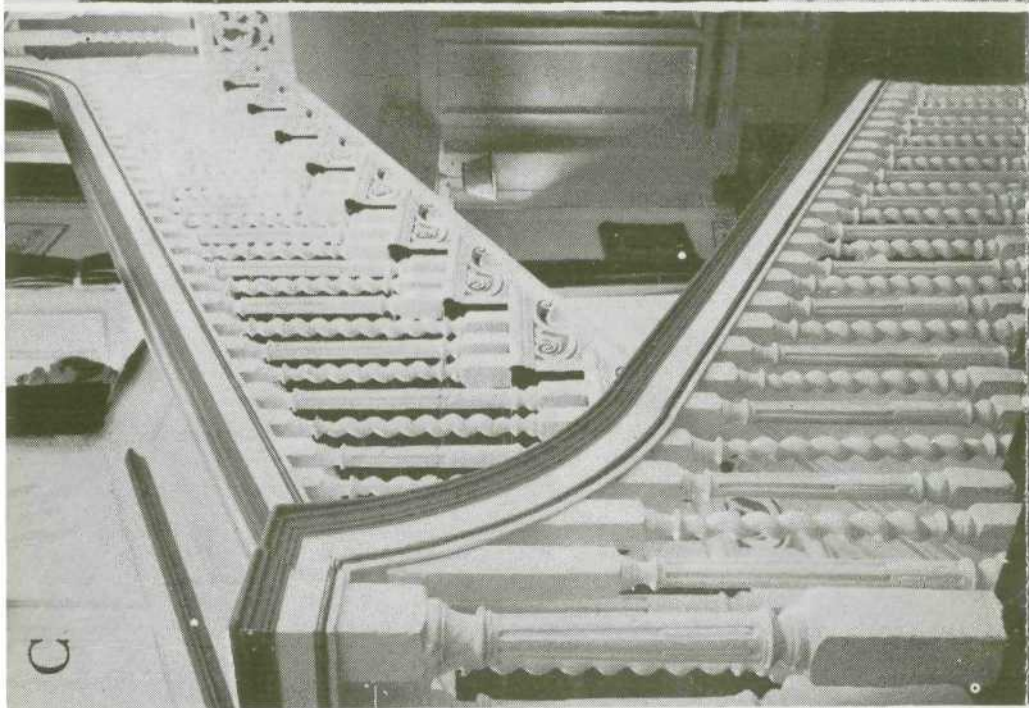




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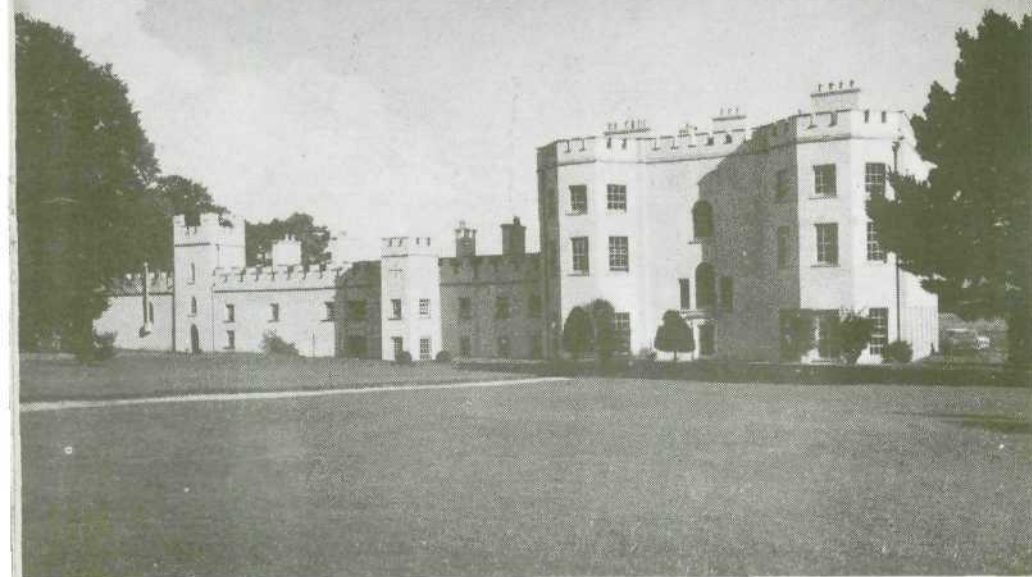




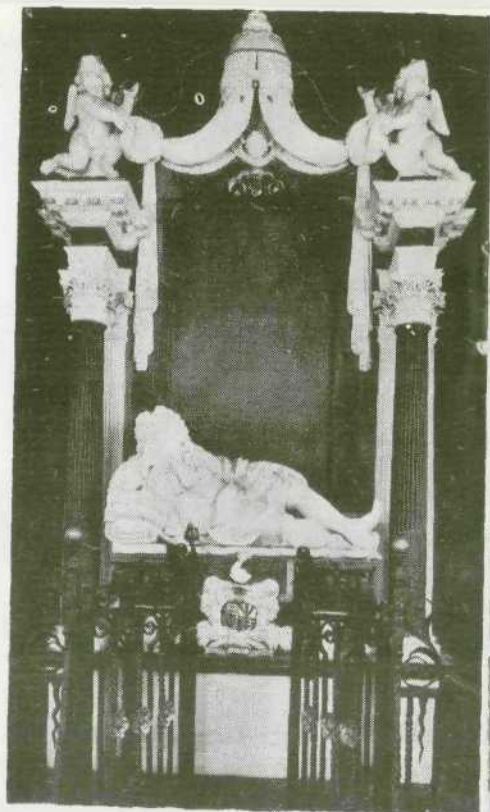
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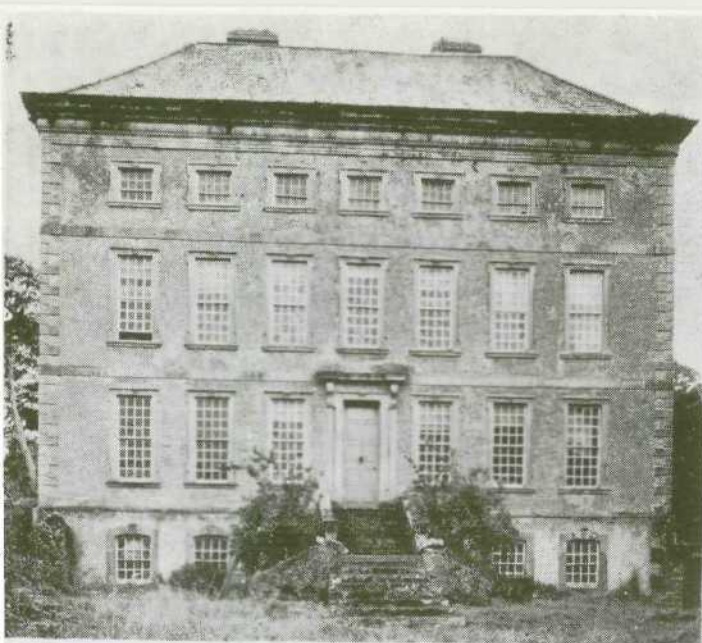
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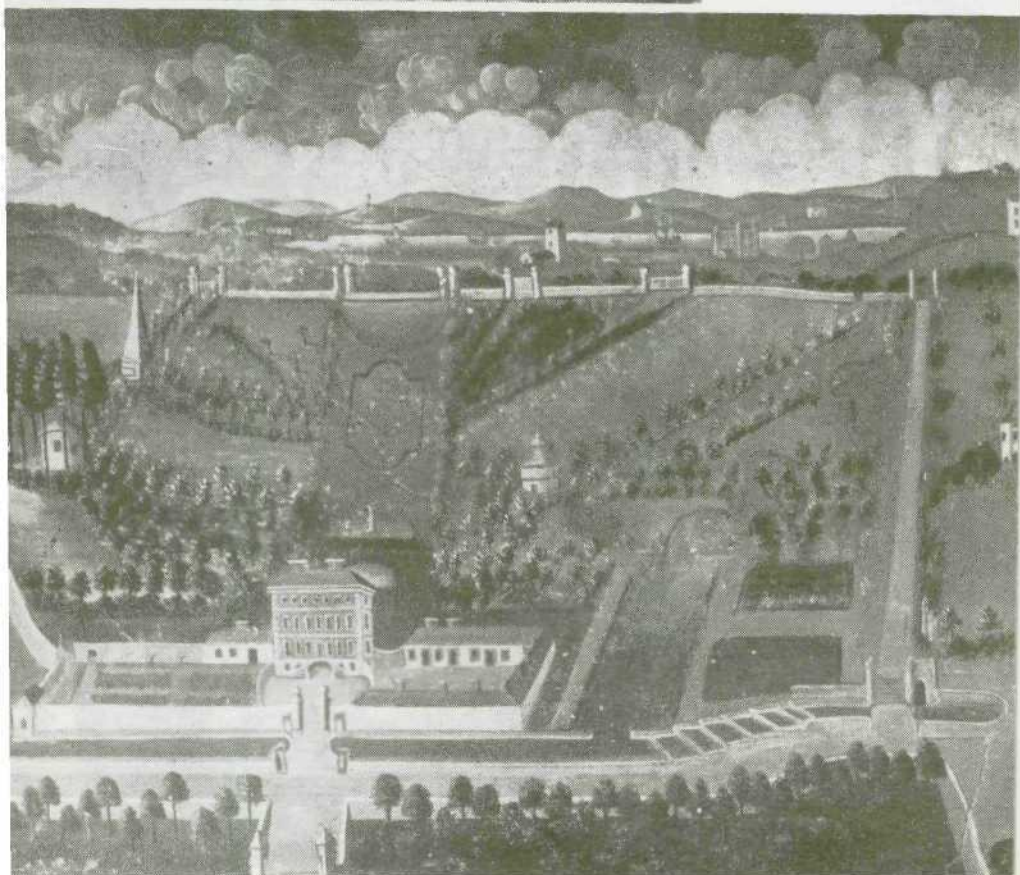






F

G







J



K

## THE TOWN HALL

Built in 1805 for the Mercantile Body, it contained one of the most spacious coffee rooms in the land, and in 1846 became the Town Hall. It has a rusticated basement and fanlighted door, and vies with the Customs House as being the most important building in Limerick.

## ST. JOHN'S SQUARE

This seems to be earlier than the rest of the development in Newtown Pery. In 1751 John Purdon of Tinerana originated the scheme interesting the landlord Pery in it. The houses cost £630 each up to the end of the century. The square was occupied by county families who came to town in the winter. Lord Glentworth, (brother of Edmund Sexten, 1st Viscount Pery), Sir Vere Hunt and other county families had houses here.<sup>8</sup> The square is built of stone and has niches between the windows.

## COUNTIES LIMERICK AND CLARE<sup>9</sup>

The counties of Limerick and Clare are not very 'thick' with fine houses. In County Limerick out of the eleven mentioned in volume V of the Georgian Society (1913), only three remain intact and the Society never visited Glin or Curragh Chase (burnt).

Clare has three interesting houses all of which are still intact.

## SHANNONGROVE, COUNTY LIMERICK

The earliest remaining 18th century house in the counties of Limerick and Clare, judging from the dated door of 1709. It was started by John Bury and evidently completed by his son in or after 1723, as the door of the river front has a baroque shield quartering Bury and Moore.<sup>10</sup> The house contains two floors of five windows with three dormers in the

roof, all surmounted by two high brick chimneys. The interior is completely panelled in wood and has been beautifully restored by the present owners Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Armitage.

#### GLIN CASTLE, COUNTY LIMERICK.<sup>11</sup>

Glin and Mount levers are the finest houses left in these counties, both remaining in the original families.

The main block of Glin was built in 1790 by Col. John Fitz-Gerald, 23rd Knight of Glin, and finished in 1812 by his son. It is a semi-gothic castellated house and contains very beautiful plasterwork, some of which is rather in the manner of James Wyatt. The double ramped staircase with its Venetian window and ceiling are among the best in Ireland.

The Fitz-Geralds in the 19th century were remarkable only for their eccentricity, and the morals of the 24th knight, who completed the house, are amusingly lampooned in an election broadsheet of 1830:

This hoary old sinner, this profligate rare  
Who gloats oe'r the ruin of virtuous and fair  
In gambling and drinking and wenching delights,  
And in these doth he spend both his days and his nights.  
Yet, this is the man who is heard to declare  
Gainst O'Grady he'll vote if the priests interfere.  
But the priests and O'Grady do not care a pin  
For the beggarly profligate Knight of the Glin.<sup>12</sup>

#### MOUNT IEVERS, COUNTY CLARE.<sup>13</sup>

For impact the most dramatic house in these counties; it has two *façades*, one of red brick with stone dressings and the other of cut stone. Built by Henry Ievers, the exact date of the start of construction is unknown, though it is known that in September 1736 John Rothery, the architect, died with the house still incomplete. In December 1736 a new agreement was made with Isaac Rothery, the son of John, and under him the house was finished. Isaac was also the architect of Bowenscourt, Doneraile Court, and Newmarket, all in County Cork. The bricks were shipped from Holland by Robert Pease and tradition holds that they were passed by



hand **from** the beach to the house — a distance of one and a half miles.

The house gives a great impression of height, as each of the three stories are slightly narrower than the one beneath. Viewed from the grounds, which were never completed as painted in a mural in the drawing-room, Mount levers has a curiously **doll's-house-like** aspect. The interior paneling is of **plaster** to simulate wood and there are four fine late eighteenth century mantelpieces.

Dean Swift visited the levers village of **Sixmilebridge**, and being refused a chop on a Friday at the local inn, expressed his annoyance **thur**:

'Can any man of common sense  
Think eating meat gives God offence  
Or that a herring hath a charm  
The Almighty's anger to disarm?  
Wrapt up in Majesty Divine  
Does he reflect on what we dine?'

#### **KILNASOOLA CHURCH, COUNTY CLARE.**

In the interior there is a fine monument to Sir Donatus O'Brien Bart., (1740) signed 'Kidwell fecit' and not by Roubilliac as was stated in Frost's 'History of Clare.'

#### **CARNELLY, COUNTY CLARE.<sup>14</sup>**

Built by the **Stamer** family in about 1740 of mellow red brick with stone facings, and most remarkable for a somewhat rococo drawing-room with heavy floral mouldings. The heiress of the Stainers married the son of one of Napoleon's marshals, the **Duc de Rovigo**.

#### **NEW HALL, COUNTY CLARE.<sup>15</sup>**

Charles McDonnel of Kilkee bought an existing house in 1764, and built the fine brick front which he called New Hall. The rectangular **façade** is relieved by two bows on either end, but particularly by the segment of the hexagonal two storied porch, which contains the front door and five windows. The most remarkable feature of the interior is the

imitation organ in the octagonal hall. The drawing-room contains plaster decoration.

## NOTES

- 1 Robert Herbert, The Chairing of Thomas Spring Rice, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Vol. IV, No. 4, Autumn 1945, P 134.
- 2 P. Fitzgerald and J. J. M'Gregor, *The History, Topography and Antiquities of the County and City of Limerick*. Dublin, 1827, Vol. II, p. 468.
- 3 *ibid.* p. 486.
- 4 *ibid.* p. 487.
- 5 J. Farrar. *An History of the City of Limerick*, 1766, p. 106.
- 6 *ibid.* p. 106.
- 7 Fitzgerald and M'Gregor, *The History, Topography and Antiquities of the County and City of Limerick*, Dublin, 1827, Vol. II, p. 581.
- 8 James Frost, Building of St. John's Square, Limerick, *Limerick Field Club Journal*, Vol III, part IX, 1905, p. 40.
- 9 Rev. J. P. Mahaffy (edit.) *The Georgian Soc. Records*. Dublin, 1913, Vol. V, pp.95 and 82.
- 10 Burke's *Landed Gentry of Ireland*, Fourth ed. 1958. See 'Howard Bury of Charleville Forest and Belvedere House.'
- 11 For a complete description see, *Irish Georgian Soc.*, Vol. II, No. 3, July-August, 1959.
- 12 *Quinibus Festerin, or the Man Mountain*, an election pamphlet, Limerick, 1830.
- 13 For a complete description see *The Georgian Society Records*, 1913, Vol. V, pp. 23-28, and M. S. I. *Glimpses of Mount levers*, Limerick, 1929.
- 14 S. Stuart and R. Herbert. Some Georgian Houses of Limerick and Clare, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 1949, p. 18-20.
- 15 *ibid.* and information from notes of S. Stuart.

## LANDSCAPE ART

JOHN BETJEMAN

I have spent the past two weeks exploring Georgian houses in Ireland. They are always rewarding.

The ivy-grown wall has gaps here and there through which one can see emerald stretches of demesne, then comes the gate lodge, like a lock-keeper's house with its low pitched roof and cottage style windows, the rusty gates and the weed-grown avenue leading to who knows what in the way of classic *façade* plain or porticoed.

Inside, if the house is not a ruin, one may find Adam-style plaster ceilings, marble chimney pieces and elegant curving stairs, and perhaps there will be some sad forgotten Peer or Baronet, representative of that great race, the Anglo-Irish, which has provided many famous generals, admirals, writers and artists as well as some of the outstanding leaders of the Irish Revolution.

Or the building may be in the castle style, in which case the lodge and gates will have pointed arches and crenellations. The castle itself will have keep and towers and a great banqueting hall with stained-glass windows and acetylene gas lights.

The castle will be a masculine answer to the delicate, feminine Georgian gothic of the locked Church of Ireland church in the near-by village. These themselves are sometimes the sort of place we go miles to see the counterpart of in our own country—box pews, clear glass, pink-washed walls, stone floors, and white plaster-work ceilings.

I think particularly of the Cathedrals of Lismore and Downpatrick. The latter has circular box pews and looks like a Dutch interior painting.

## ESSENTIAL TREES

Such scenery as this, still to be found in Ireland, is like whar is shown in the books of coloured aquatints and copper engravings on the picturesque published a century



and a half ago. The essential of such scenery is trees.

Irish Georgian achitecture, like much building of the same date in England, depended for its effect on the judicious planting of clumps of trees, both as a background for your sight of the house or castle as you wound up its avenue in your coach, and to provide vistas to be seen from the house when you arrived there.

In the late 18th century, when so many country houses were built or improved upon both in England and Ireland, the school of landscape gardening in favour tried to make an effect of rolling endlessness by the skilful disposition of **hard-**wood plantations, generally of beech and oak.

If there was no stream available to be dammed and turned into a lake, which would appear from the house as part of an enormous river like it does at Blenheim Palace, then the grassland was treated as a sea into which capes of trees stretched out, the rippling green surface diversified here and there with sylvan clumps like islands.

#### IN PLACE OF FOLLIES

The Irish landlords seldom had the money to build the temples as at Stowe, sham ruins as at Virginia Water, or folly towers (the last of which was that built at Faringdon in the 1930's by Lord Berners from the designs of the present Duke of Wellington). Instead the Irish planted trees.

How essential these were, with their billowing curves as a contrast to to the square, simply-proportioned architecture, one can see tragically often in Ireland when an estate has been taken over by the Land Commission and the trees cut down around the blackened ruins of the great house. Only from tree stumps can one visualise how splendid the landscape must once have been.

And though the Government of the Irish Republic is putting through a courageous programme of afforestation on bare mountain sides this is mostly of conifers. These may be necessary for economic and arboricultural reasons, but they do not suit a landscape where hardwood is native nor form an adequate substitute for the aesthetic loss sustained in

the cutting down of these great parks.

I was lately in the splendid demesne of Moore Park which hangs above that swiftly flowing salmon river, the Blackwater, near Fermoy, Co. Cork. Some oaks in their prime were being sawn down and the Park partitioned into small-holdings with concrete posts and wire mesh fences. It may have been economically necessary, but it was like seeing someone slash with a knife a Gainsborough landscape.

## OUR OWN OPPORTUNITY

So many splendid parks and woodlands survive in Ireland that such a loss can be more easily borne than in England, where landscape architecture achieved by woods and grassland becomes more rare and precious every day.

Indeed, the only part where it is being carried on in the grand 18th-century manner is in Windsor Great Park under the ruling genius of Sir Eric Savile, who plants for posterity as all great gardeners should.

An opportunity for landscape architecture on the grand scale presents itself in England now in a way that has not happened since the early 19th century.

We are driving through the country vast new roads, impressive feats of engineering equal to those of the great age of railways. They are creating a landscape as they go, carving into hills, embanked above meadows and by-passing towns which sorely need a rest from the thunder of lorries.

These roads should be constructed with an eye to the delicate and varied landscape through which they pass. Just as the railway engineers, with their viaducts and tunnel entrances built of the local materials and in the local styles of the counties, paid regard to regional changes, so should the new roads.

They should not have cumbersome concrete lamp-standards, gimcrack petrol advertisements, pseudo-artistic "advertising stations," and a needless clutter of signs and symbols put up by different Ministries and Councils. They are worthy of better treatment in what has come to be called street furniture.

## ACRES NOT AVENUES

Above all, the new roads are an opportunity for planting trees—not the everlasting conifer but indigenous trees, oak and elm and ash and beech. The new roads are on too grand a scale for the flowering cherries and trivial prunus of suburban by-lanes around Wembley.

Trees should be thought of in terms of acres not avenues, and groups not straight lines. They need not be everywhere: they should be in the right place.

So far as I know, no consideration whatever has been shown by the Minister of Transport towards the landscaping of the new trunk roads he is driving through England. Heaven forbid that it should be left in the hands of borough engineers.

This is a chance to use trees in the way they were used by the great architects and landscape gardeners in Ireland.