



The several incarnations of Plassey: Plassey House, University of Limerick

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WITH THE DESIGN OF A HOUSE AND DEMESNE, THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF A family are expressed within currently established parameters of taste as interpreted by an architect. So, the individual and society find accommodation, and the result is a specific example of a more general phenomenon. The same is true when that house is altered, except that this time the older order of the original house is an additional factor, and the resulting building, if the original is not obliterated, will more likely be skewed towards eccentric individuality. When the house becomes something else, new needs and aspirations are grafted onto a form which is retained. However, the atmosphere of the older house and its significance will inevitably be altered. These themes of influence and change all emerge in a study of the successive incarnations of Plassey, once a house, now part of the University of Limerick.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

IN THE MID-SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, THERE WAS A CASTLE AND A MILL OWNED BY EDMUND Bourke FitzRichard, standing by the River Shannon in the townland of Sreelane, the greater part of which would later become the Plassey estate.¹ Situated in the parish of Kilmurry, three miles east of Limerick city, Sreelane is a gently undulating area of 112 acres rising to about twenty meters (sixty-five feet).² In 1654 it was described as fertile, with four-fifths of the land supporting cattle and crops; the other fifth was bog. Whereas it is the castles of the neighbouring townlands of Castletroy and Newcastle that are encoded in their nomenclature, Sreelane owes its name to its mill. It was spelt Shralane

*1 – View of the north front of Plassey House remodelled in 1864-71, possibly by Charles Lanyon
(photo by Kieran Clancy)*



2 – First edition Ordnance Survey map, surveyed 1st January 1840 (1844)

The townland of Sreelane and the two estates of Plassey and Milford. Plassey Mills and mill-race and the ice house are also visible.

in the *Ordnance Survey Name Book*, where the original Irish version was given as Sraet Leathan, which translated as ‘broad mill-race’. By the late eighteenth century it was named Milford.³ The mill, as depicted on the Down Survey map of 1654-59, was a pitched-roof, single-storey structure with one vertical wheel. It would have processed locally grown cereals, probably for a local market as the Shannon was not navigable into Limerick at that time. The castle was described in the Civil Survey of 1654-56 as ‘broken’. This may imply that it was ruined and uninhabited; however, it could also suggest damage in the recent violence, or decay due to neglect because of poverty or family circumstance, neither of which necessarily mean that it was uninhabited. It was, according to the Down Survey map, a simple two-bay, two-storey building with battlements, much smaller than the four-storey tower house which was dramatically situated on a rocky outcrop in the neighbouring townland of Newcastle, or the unusual five-sided Castle Troy, both of which still stand. There is no trace of Sreelane castle or mill today. However, a map drawn by William Eyres around 1752 shows that a mill existed then in the location of present Plassey Mill. This may have been incorporated into the early nineteenth-century mill. The castle may have been incorporated into buildings at Plassey shown on the 1844 Ordnance Survey map (Plate 2).⁴

Sreelane had been forfeited in the 1690s, and in April 1703 the trustees of forfeited estates granted the townland to Richard Powell.⁵ At some time in the first half of the eighteenth century it was acquired by Francis Pierpoint Burton of Buncraggy, county Clare.⁶ An MP, Pierpoint Burton lived mostly in England, but had substantial estates in Limerick and Clare and would inherit his uncle’s peerage, becoming 2nd Baron Conyngham, in 1781.⁷ In 1763 Pierpoint Burton sold Sreelane to Thomas Maunsell as part of his effort to raise £12,000 for his wife and children.⁸

It is possible that during the years between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, the castle at Sreelane was either demolished or incorporated into an extended house. The 1844 Ordnance Survey map shows a long, single-pile building of

about six bays, with two recessed wings of about three bays each forming the north side of a symmetrically planted walled garden.⁹ This garden had a central diamond-shaped feature, concentric planting, four circular features at the corners, and a perimeter path. Behind was a slightly smaller walled garden, also with a perimeter walk and circular corner features. The buildings and gardens were situated on a slight rise overlooking the river.

The configuration of the long building and the walled gardens suggest several cultural patterns. The symmetry of the long building with its two recessed wings points to an awareness of the classical design principles that were becoming more prevalent in Ireland in the second half of the seventeenth century. The formal design of the walled gardens refers to an earlier baroque fashion of the seventeenth century. In such designs the house was often situated close to the walled garden. However, their proximity to each other could also indicate a medieval origin; the garden may have been the remnant of a medieval bawn built in association with the small castle that was recorded in the 1650s. By the 1840s, when Plassey House (the square building on the map) had been built, the long building was probably used as stables. But it is possible that it had previously been a dwelling house, built in the late seventeenth in the newly fashionable classical idiom, possibly incorporating the older castle and its bawn walls. With the two walled enclosures close to the house, there was a measure of the defensible ground that was, in the uncertain conditions of the late seventeenth century, still regarded as intermittently necessary for the protection of animals and people.¹⁰

THOMAS MAUNSELL (1726-1814) / THE GEORGIAN HOUSE

WHEN SREELANE WAS BOUGHT BY THOMAS MAUNSELL IN 1763, IT WAS ACQUIRED by someone looking for an estate where he could establish his presence in Ireland, preferably in county Limerick.¹¹ Thomas Maunsell, born in 1726, was the second son of Thomas Maunsell, a barrister, who had trained at the Middle Temple in London after his son's birth and been called to the Irish Bar in 1741.¹² It was his father, Richard, brought up in county Waterford, who had established the Maunsells in Limerick. He placed the Maunsells in the upper echelons of Anglo-Irish society by marrying an heiress to estates in county Dublin, acquiring a county Limerick estate and city house, and becoming Mayor of Limerick in 1734. For twenty-one years, from 1740 to 1761, he was MP for the city at a time when it was undergoing modest expansion.¹³

Barrister Thomas was Richard's first son, although when Richard's wife died and he remarried, it was the first son of this second marriage who would be Richard's heir, effectively disinheriting Thomas.¹⁴ The barrister acquired a house in Dublin, but he maintained and strengthened his connections within the Ascendancy families of the west by marrying Dorothea Waller, the youngest daughter of Richard Waller of Castle Waller near Nenagh in county Tipperary, and living in county Limerick. His son Thomas (later of

Plassey) was brought up in Dublin and Limerick with four brothers and four sisters. He was educated at Mr Ingram's School in Limerick city and followed his elder brother to Trinity College Dublin in 1745.¹⁵ In search of a career, Thomas left for India in 1751 as a writer for the East India Company.¹⁶

He was starting on the bottom rung of a potentially rewarding career, although even in 1751 it was not obvious just how rewarding this could be. Robert Clive, who would amass one of the largest private fortunes taken from India, and who would fight at Plassey with Thomas Maunsell, had arrived at Fort St George in Madras, just seven years before Thomas Maunsell. Fort St George was one of the four enclaves from which the East India Company conducted its increasingly lucrative Far Eastern trade. By 1751 Clive had acquired successive responsibilities, been commissioned captain in the company's army and seized Arcot from the French, the East India Company's principal European rival in India and, since 1744, their military opponent in Europe. He was made a colonel and chosen to lead a force against the *nawab* (ruler) of Bengal, Siraj ud Daulah, who had formed an alliance with the French and in 1756 had forced the British from their Calcutta base, Fort William.

As part of the preparations to attack Siraj, the young Thomas Maunsell was appointed by the select committee of Fort St George in Madras to be a civil commissary with the rank of captain 'to act in all things' under Clive on the expedition that sailed for Calcutta on 10th October 1756.¹⁷ He was probably with Clive when his force – a composite army formed of soldiers from the 39th Regiment of Foot (the first King's Regiment to serve in India), East India Company men, *sepoys* (Indian infantry privates) and a naval squadron – reoccupied Fort William on 22nd January 1757 and, two months later, when they took the French base at Chandernagore. He was certainly with Clive three months after that, on 23rd June, when they occupied the *nawab's* hunting lodge at Plassey on the east bank of the Bhagirathi, about sixty miles north of Calcutta.¹⁸ The hunting lodge, dubbed Plassey House, was a flat-roofed structure facing the river to the east behind a series of arches at the top of a flight of steps.¹⁹ Walls protected the house on the other three sides. A mango grove stretched behind it to the south, while Siraj's army and French tanks were lined up to the north.

It was a monumentally unequal battle for Clive, who, with 3,000 men, faced about 40,000. As was well known, the battle was won not because of military prowess, but through luck and circumstance.²⁰ But the victory was crucial to the expansion of the East India Company, and came to be regarded as a cornerstone of the British empire in the east. The battle itself was soon famous, with maps and prospects published showing the river, the hunting lodge, the mango grove and the positions of the opposing forces.²¹

Thomas Maunsell's job after the battle was to organise the transfer of spoils to Madras.²² As a captain, he was entitled to half the 'prizes' taken, though he would credit Clive as the source of his good fortune. He returned to Madras in August 1757 and stayed there for two years. Maunsell was preparing for his future in Ireland, asking his father to find him a property. He told John Carnac, Clive's aide-de-camp, that he had the chance

of an estate near Limerick, ‘bounded by the Shannon’, which may have been in Sreelane.²³ By May 1759, Thomas had secured himself a passage on *The Warren*, an East India Company ship. He embarked on 14th August 1759 and arrived in England seven and a half months later. It was three years before he acquired land in Sreelane, and another six years before he married Mary Rochfort, daughter of John Rochfort of Cloghrenan in county Carlow.

Nabobs – men who had made a fortune in the east and used it to buy their way in society – were of course resented in some quarters, and Thomas Maunsell was no exception. It is recorded that he was described in the opposition list of 1774 as ‘a nabob-jobber’ who made ‘a vast sum of money – the family were worth nothing before’.²⁴ Like Clive, he invested his money carefully to secure the status of himself and his family. He bought seats in the Irish Parliament: in 1768 he purchased Thomastown, county Kilkenny, from James Agar for himself, and a year later he acquired Kilmallock for his father.²⁵ A sympathetic observer noted that Thomas Maunsell’s ‘only object is to see his father on the Bench. Purchased both seats with that view. They are worthy, honourable men. Have great merit from their uniform and steady support and deserve the particular attention of Government.’²⁶ Maunsell’s father did not become a judge, but he was a senior barrister and he was given two lucrative posts – Counsel to the Commissioners of Customs, and, in 1775 Counsel to the Revenue Board, the latter giving him an annual income of £800 a year.²⁷

Thomas of Plassey was an MP for fifteen years, from 1768 to 1783, his father for nine years, from 1769 to 1778. This was the period when patriot opposition, which argued for extending the rights and liberties of the Irish parliament, was gathering momentum. It would achieve a measure of realisation in Grattan’s parliament of 1782–1800, ending with the Union. Thomas Maunsell and his father had no sympathy for this. They supported viceregal initiatives to increase Irish contributions to Westminster, such as Harcourt’s absentee tax of 1773. When the American Revolutionary War broke out in 1775, they did not share a general Irish sympathy for the colonists, both voting against the pro-American amendment to the Speech from the Throne. In 1780 patriot policies emerged fully with Grattan’s declaration of the Rights of Ireland and Yelverton’s motion to modify Poyning’s Law, both of which Thomas voted against.²⁸ However, he did vote for Catholic Relief in 1774 (which allowed Catholics to take the oath of allegiance) and for the Catholic Relief Act four years later, both extremely cautious and pragmatic steps to increase Catholic rights in the recently enlarged British empire with its higher proportion of Catholic inhabitants.²⁹ Thomas also worked in the administrative sphere, becoming a Commissioner of the Revenue in 1780 under John Beresford. An exceptionally able administrator and a man of considerable influence, Beresford was also a Wide Streets Commissioner, responsible for establishing classical urban design principles in the capital and for bringing James Gandon to Ireland in 1781 to design the Custom House.

Using his wealth, Thomas secured his position locally in Limerick: in 1760, shortly after he arrived from India, he became a freeman of Limerick city; in 1768 he became a

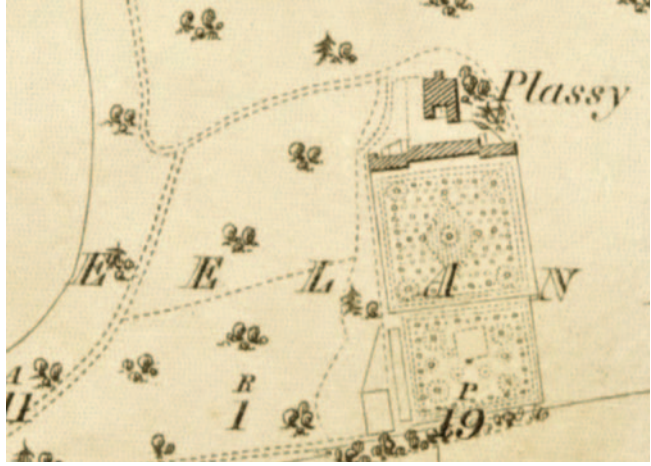
member of the Company of Undertakers for making the River Shannon navigable, subscribing £500, the second largest figure;³⁰ in 1769 he was listed as a governor of the County Limerick Hospital;³¹ and in 1779-80, now a well-established figure, he was a governor-guardian of the lying-in hospital. But he is remembered locally for being one of the founders of Maunsell's Bank, also known as the Bank of Limerick, the first private bank in the city and the most successful. Economic expansion in Limerick, which began to take off after 1782, increased during the period of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) due to the growth in the provision trade. This meant that from the late eighteenth century there was an increasing need for banks in the city. This was officially met by a national bank, the Bank of Ireland, established in 1782. But in the absence of provincial branches, merchants and potential investors outside Dublin set up private banks. Unfortunately these were restricted to six partners, which curtailed their capacity to acquire the capital necessary to ensure stability or success during the economic crises that occurred after the war was over.³²

Thomas established the bank in partnership with his younger brother Robert Maunsell, Sir Matthew Blakiston, Richard Maunsell and Thomas Brooke, six years after his political career ended. Robert, a convivial and generous man, had had a successful career in India. Like his brother he had gone out to Madras, but he had stayed longer and become Governor of Ganjam in the north-east area of the Madras Presidency. While there, he had averted a famine by storing up grain and selling it at cost price, thereby, he told people subsequently, depriving himself of a fortune.³³ He had married the daughter of John Maxwell Stone, Chief of the Council of Ganjam, and returned to Limerick in 1789. He lived at 7 Bank Place, a new Georgian terrace near the Custom House, next to their bank at No. 6,³⁴ had a large family and was well regarded, particularly for the fashionable parties he held in aid of charity.³⁵ Sir Matthew Blakiston was Thomas's wife's brother-in-law (the husband of his wife's sister) who mainly lived in England.³⁶ There was no competitor in Limerick for the first eleven years of the bank's existence. In the early years of the nineteenth century, when development escalated in Newtown Pery, with leases selling briskly and new brick terraces and stone warehouses appearing one after another on the wide streets designed by Davis Dukart in 1765, two more banks appeared. However, in the periodic economic crises of the time, brought on by bad harvests, these banks failed while Maunsell's Bank survived, supported by the publicly expressed confidence of local merchants. It was, thus, a shock when Maunsell's Bank closed its doors on Saturday 27th May 1820 and the partners auctioned their assets.³⁷ By then, Thomas Maunsell had been dead for six years.

In the last years of the eighteenth century, several parts of Ireland experienced violent outbreaks orchestrated by the Defenders and the United Irishmen. In 1793 the Militia Act provided for the formation of thirty-eight regiments in the country. That year, the City of Limerick Regiment of Militia was raised, and five years later twenty-four yeomanry companies were formed.³⁸ Thomas Maunsell commanded the Merchants' Company and his cousin George of Milford commanded the Revenue Company. Maurice

3 – First edition Ordnance Survey map (1844)

This shows the 17th-century walled garden fronted by a possibly 17th-century linear range, probably converted to stables. Thomas Maunsell's c.1770 house stands just to the north.



Lenihan, Limerick's nineteenth-century historian, remarks that these two companies were 'particularly respectable', although there is no record of any military engagements. A remnant of Thomas's company uniform survives in Limerick Museum – a smart copper button depicting a crowned harp decorated with a female Liberty/Hibernia figure (ironically, given Maunsell's political allegiances, also used as a patriot symbol), and the words 'Limerick Merchants'.

When Thomas Maunsell died on Saturday 23rd July 1814 at the age of 88, his death merited a paragraph in the *Limerick Chronicle*.³⁹ The volume of his listed achievements was underlined by the observation, 'To enter into a detail of the active and useful public avocations in which he was engaged, would be impossible.' Then, as was customary, dutiful reference was made to his domestic life: 'and in private life, he embraced all those affectionate, tender, amiable, and benevolent qualities, which added dignity to human nature, and rendered him a most praiseworthy example to all with whom he was acquainted, or had intercourse in the various transactions of a well spent life.' Generalised, even for an early-nineteenth-century obituary, it suggests that Maunsell did not readily reveal himself, and that once his work was done he retired to his estate to enjoy its beauty and remoteness.

It is likely that Thomas Maunsell built (or possibly refurbished) the house that is shown on the 1844 Ordnance Survey map sometime between 1763 and 1796, probably after 1772 (Plate 3).⁴⁰ There is no surviving image or description of the house, but the 1844 map reveals a square structure – a Georgian box – with a projecting element, a porch, facing the river, and two small, unequal projections at the rear. The core of this relatively modest late-eighteenth-century house survives in the current Plassey House.⁴¹ It is the two-storey-over-basement easternmost block of the house – the three-bay entrance and four-bay side elevations – a perfect square whose sides measured 18.5m (sixty-one feet).⁴² The present flat-roofed porch is a later addition. The adhoc protrusions to the rear may have been single-storey and have now gone.



Plassey House

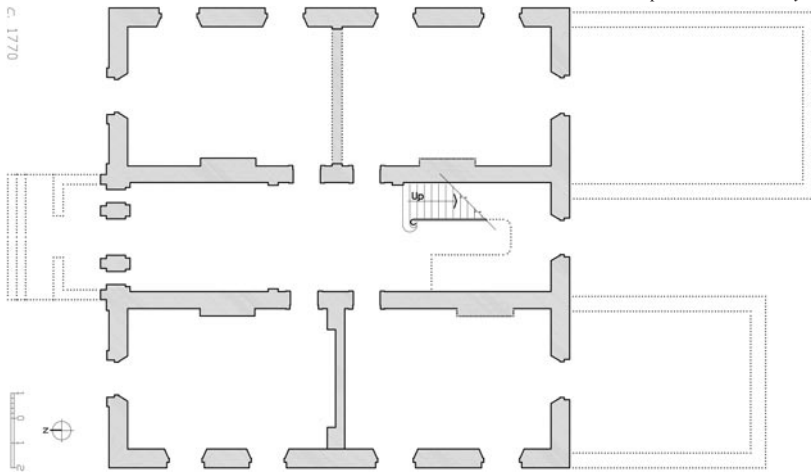
4 – Section through halls and staircase, c.1770

Roof form and chimney positioning and detail, ground-floor door paneling and porch derived from houses of similar period.

5 – Plan, c.1770

Rear projections and porch derived from 1840 map shown dotted. Earlier details reinstated – chimney pieces in three of the rooms and smaller window openings at the rear.

(survey John Duggan; presentation Healy & Partners)



The house had a simple plan, with four main rooms on the ground floor, two on either side of a central hall, with the staircase to the rear (Plates 4, 5). There was also a front entrance hall.⁴³ Upstairs there were five rooms around a central landing. The straightforward compactness of the arrangement brings pattern book plans to mind, such as John Payne’s *Twelve Designs for Country Houses of Two, Three, and Four Rooms on a Floor proper for Glebes and small estates*, published in 1757. However, Plassey was grander than these; the rooms were larger, more space and drama was given to the entrance, and the effortless symmetry of Plassey was not found in Payne’s designs. Payne also economised by putting the flues on the wider outside walls, whereas there were two internal spine walls which took the flues and supported the roof trusses in Plassey, and, with the chimneys most likely on the roof ridge, gave a neater façade with a hipped roof.

The internal joinery seems, from the few survivals, to have been identical to that found in the red-brick terraces that were being erected in the city by merchants and

6 – Detail of ceiling plaster on first-floor landing

This may incorporate work from the c.1770 house

(photo by Kieran Clancy)



bankers, and was made locally. Elements of the original staircase (the turned balusters and the treads) were probably incorporated into the back stair, now situated in the later extension. It is likely that the front hall ceiling was divided into compartments in the late-eighteenth century, and the modillions (small projecting brackets) in the cornice on the first-floor landing are also from the original house (Plate 6).⁴⁴ The white marble fireplace in the front part of the East Room is late-eighteenth century, but was installed by the University of Limerick.⁴⁵ It is decorated with a central plaque depicting Ceres, the goddess of fertility, in a chariot driven by lions, with two female heads wreathed in vines carved above the columns on either side of the fireplace, all details suggesting that it was designed for a dining room.⁴⁶

The late eighteenth-century house turned its back on the long, narrow seventeenth-century building and its associated walled garden, though it respected the existing symmetry of the garden and buildings by locating its centre on their central axis. Looking outwards, Maunsell's building proclaimed a new sensibility in which the house, set on a rise facing the river and the Clare hills beyond, was a freestanding object in the landscape. It was the picturesque delight in the roll of open landscape, the view of water, the judicious placing of a clump of trees. In many parts of England, and increasingly in Ireland, this informal naturalistic aesthetic was being created artificially. At Sreelane, Thomas Maunsell exploited an inherent picturesqueness in the landscape, as did his neighbours to the east at Willow Bank and Rose Lawn, and his cousin, George Maunsell, who had built Milford House (Plate 7).⁴⁷ Notwithstanding its splendid detachment, Plassey House was conventionally tied to its setting. An avenue left the road at a porter's lodge and curved up towards the front of the house, back tracking to the stables before sweeping up to the entrance area.⁴⁸ Parkland spread between the house and the river, near which was an ice house (which may have had a seventeenth-century origin, was still there in the 1860s, but had gone by 1900). There was a landing place on the river which allowed more direct access to the city than the road. Similar features flowed around the neighbouring houses.



7 – First edition Ordnance Survey map (1844) showing area on River Shannon east of Limerick

Plassey and its neighbouring estates were all rural retreats for gentlemen who had made their money as merchants, bankers, in the army or the East India Company. The type of property they aspired to had become established as a building and social category in the early eighteenth century with the publication of designs for what were often referred to as picturesque villas.⁴⁹ Robert Morris was the first, in 1728, to publish designs for small classical houses of two storeys and three to five bays, though by the time Plassey was built, size was less the determining factor than the country setting. The estates, close to the city with their garden-like demesnes, were partially self-supporting, with extensive walled gardens providing vegetables, and outbuildings housing animals and dairies as well as the horses and carriages needed by the gentleman and his family. Viewed collectively, the estates built across the gentle terrain to the east of Limerick city created a distinctive, cultivated prelude to the city.⁵⁰ The approach began at Castleconnell, where the river was lined with parkland trees without interruption, and ended with the villas of Mill Road immediately adjacent to the city. In the middle, at Sreelane and Castletroy, meadows, susceptible to flooding, interrupted the parks and lawns. Here Plassey stood out as the most impressive estate – the house larger and more prominent, its walled gardens bigger, its parkland more extensive, and its owner more influential.

The Plassey estate had another reference point which also elevated it above its peers. It is possible that Thomas Maunsell was drawn to Sreelane because of its topographical similarity to the area on the bank of the River Bhagirathi in Bengal, and that he felt he had constructed his own Plassey House overlooking the river. In naming his estate Plassey and publicly advertising his association with what had become a famous and illustrious battle, Maunsell was making an expansive gesture. He was not the only one to use the name Plassey. Robert Clive had acquired an extensive, though scattered, estate in county Clare in 1761, which he named Plassey.⁵¹ Further, he asked to use the name for his title when he gained what was for him a disappointing Irish peerage. He was granted the title Lord Clive, Baron Plassey in the County of Clare in March 1762. There is no evi-

dence that Clive ever resided on his Irish estate, and he seems not to have attended parliament on College Green. Maunsell, resident and conscientious, may, in his gesture, have intended a veiled challenge to Clive. He was certainly staking a claim to the glory that radiated from the reputation of the battle and, despite backbiting from parliamentary colleagues, was revelling in his *nabob* status.

ROBERT HEDGES MAUNSELL AND REUBEN HARVEY / THE MILL

THOMAS MAUNSELL'S FIRST WIFE DIED PREMATURELY AND HE MARRIED HIS COUSIN Dorothea Grace, daughter of the Rev William Maunsell of Limerick, with whom he had two daughters, Elizabeth Dorothea and Dorothea Jane. When Thomas died he divided his property between these daughters.⁵² In 1816 the eldest, Elizabeth Dorothea, married her cousin Robert Hedges Eyre Maunsell.⁵³ Robert Hedges was the second son of Thomas's younger brother George, the Dean of Leighlin. His mother was the daughter of Richard Hedges Eyre of Macroom Castle. He had joined the army and attained the rank of major. By the time he married Elizabeth he had left the army and become a partner in Maunsell's Bank, joining when Thomas retired in 1814.⁵⁴ The bank had experienced its first serious run in January 1813, just before he joined. Unfortunately for him, this was not an isolated panic, and there was a further run in October 1814, followed by a prolonged crisis. However, it was six years before Maunsell's Bank succumbed. After that, Robert Hedges and his two partners had to sell their property to settle the bank's debts.⁵⁵ Two years later he still had a debt of £9,750, owing money to, among others, his father, the dean, James Cooper, of Cooper Hill, and the city apothecary, Poole Hickman Vesey, of Shannon View (a neighbour at Plassey), which he was unable to pay.⁵⁶ Perhaps under the instruction of Thomas who had anticipated this situation, Elizabeth's property was tied up in such a way in the marriage settlement of 1816 that it was for her sole use, 'free from the debts and control of her husband'.⁵⁷ Thus, Plassey was not sold. However, in 1823 Elizabeth obtained a substantial yearly annuity until July 1825, and she agreed to pay her husband £600 a year for three years.⁵⁸ After that she had freer access to her inheritance, and the agreement was amended to a payment of £800 a year for the rest of her life. It was probably at this point that living at Plassey put them under financial pressure, and they let the estate, moving to Beakestown House, county Tipperary.⁵⁹

In about 1820, before they left Plassey, Robert Hedges found sufficient capital to build a mill on the bank of the river at the north-west edge of the estate.⁶⁰ Milling was a potentially lucrative business. Flour production had expanded with the increase in tillage since the 1770s, and there was a growing native market.⁶¹ Robert Hedges, on good advice, had chosen an excellent site.⁶² Situated at the junction of the River Shannon and the Limerick-Killaloe canal, the mill lay on the route for both transporting grain to Limerick and the flour milled in the city to its markets. This trade had been in operation since 1799.⁶³ There was a good water supply as Robert Hedges invested in a wide feeder canal

(later the mill race), cut across relatively level land in a slight loop of the river. The mill building itself was an ambitious structure. It was six storeys high with a seven-storey tower to the south, facing the house. It had a series of Gothic-inspired, pointed-arch windows, decorated with label mouldings, running up the south wall, and loopholes in unexpected places, one ingeniously wedged between the tower and the main mill building (Plates 8, 9).⁶⁴ From the river it presented a utilitarian face, and was comparable to Lock Mills, the prominent mill situated at the mouth of the canal in the city. From the estate it could be viewed as a folly with an historic resonance, the gothicised tower referring to the medieval tower houses of Castletroy and Newcastle, both now ruins.⁶⁵

Although unusual, fantasy did have a place in late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century mill design. There were castellated mills in Trim, county Meath, and at Milford, county Carlow, and a tower was incorporated in the mill at Ballinrobe, county Mayo.⁶⁶ Almost uniquely, the Ballinrobe mill was celebrated as part of the estate. In James O'Connor's paintings of Ballinrobe House and estate of 1818, the mill features with the house as a gracious, distant object in the rolling, naturalised landscape of the estate – not, admittedly, a folly, as at Plassey, but a structure of equal gravitas (and plainness) to the house.⁶⁷ In these paintings, a building representing the production and trade relied on by the owner, Courtney Kenny, was given a significant place within what was presented as a gentleman's demesne. Robert Hedges, partially disguising his mill as a folly to integrate the utilitarian into the demesne, showed imagination and versatility. Structures such as ruins and ornamented cottages were popular as decorative features in these sort of picturesque landscapes with their carefully enhanced natural prospects that had, as we have seen, transformed the banks of the Shannon above Limerick. They almost never had a practical purpose as well. Although Robert Hedges had medieval ruins at hand to inspire him, he may also have been stimulated by the work his cousin was doing reconstructing Macroom Castle, a fifteenth-century structure, in a Gothic style.⁶⁸

By 1837, Reuben Harvey lived at Plassey and ran the mill.⁶⁹ His father, John Massy Harvey, a Quaker from Cork, had built a successful milling business in Limerick, centred on a tide-mill just downstream from Curragower Falls and a large store in Francis Street.⁷⁰ He had died in 1834, and Reuben, with his brother, had taken over the running of the business. Buying Plassey Mill, the Harveys had expanded their enterprise significantly for it had a constant supply of water and a much higher production rate than Curragower Mill. They were soon improving Plassey, and they built a bakery in the city to tap into the local market for bread.⁷¹ Like most grain mills in county Limerick, two operations were performed within the single building at Plassey: one, using five pairs of stones, ground wheat into flour, and was valued at £75 in 1840, and the other processed corn or oatmeal using two pairs of stones, and was valued at £11 12s.⁷² There were two sets of elevators and the cleaning and sifting machinery that would be expected in a nineteenth-century mill. It was by far the biggest of the four mills in the parish of Kilmurry and one of the larger mills in county Limerick, though there were several that were bigger, such as one in Askeaton, valued at £121 10s, and one in Croom, valued at £114 8s.

Plassey Mill

8 – South elevation of mill tower

9 – Detail of loop-hole between the tower and main mill building

(photos by the author)



On 2nd February 1841, the mill was destroyed in a fire. The building was gutted and the machinery broken in a conflagration which lasted a whole day and was watched by a sizable crowd as one water jet and several army detachments tried to put it out. The *Limerick Chronicle* journalist has given us a graphic description of the process of destruction:

The crackling of the timbers, and tremendous noise of the weighty machinery as it tumbled through the lofts, presented a fearful and melancholy spectacle; and when, about nine o'clock, the ponderous roof of the mill fell in, smashing down the lofts, and destroying everything in the interior of the building – the scene of ruin and devastation, became, indeed, really awful.⁷³

Only 200 sacks of flour were saved. The fire was particularly badly timed, for just two months previously Harvey had failed to renew his insurance premium after his recent improvements. However, the mill was rebuilt and expanded.⁷⁴

RICHARD RUSSELL (1803-1871) / THE ITALIAN PALAZZO

IN 1864 THE RATEABLE ANNUAL VALUATION OF PLASSEY HOUSE (PLATE 10) INCREASED from £42 to £50. Then, seven years later, it was raised again to £70. Richard Russell had acquired the estate and invested heavily in improvements, which were completed in two stages. By 1864 the house was enlarged, substantially altered, and given new decorative plaster inside and out.⁷⁵ When the valuer visited the estate after the second phase of building in 1870, he found a new gate lodge and conservatories, and was so impressed by the house that he raised the valuation by more than the amount warranted by the most recent additions.⁷⁶ Richard Russell was sixty-one when he took up residence in his newly sumptuous house in 1864. With his brother, he ran the most successful business in Limerick, John Norris Russell & Sons, and was president of the Chamber of Commerce. But these positions had only come to him since his father's death in 1859.

The Russell family had come to Ireland with Cromwell's army, and within two generations was making a mark on city politics.⁷⁷ Richard's grandfather, Francis Russell, had been a sheriff when the city Exchange was rebuilt next to St Mary's Cathedral in 1777. Of his five sons, only John Norris Russell, born in 1774, remained in Limerick (three died, and the other, a doctor, lived in Toulouse), and only one of his two daughters survived, marrying George Gubbins of Kilfrush, county Limerick. The fortune and status of the Russell family in Limerick city thus rested with John Norris who worked hard at both.

The new town was growing slowly during John Norris's childhood and adolescence in the 1770s and '80s, as redbrick terraces and stone warehouses appeared almost one by one on the wide streets designed in 1765. But once he began to establish himself as a merchant, the rate of growth increased, so that John Norris's commercial and entrepreneurial instincts flourished in an expanding economy. He married the daughter of a Cork



10 – View of the front elevation of Plassey House
(photo by Kieran Clancy)

landowner in 1798, and in 1810 built a corn and maize mill on the quays, which later had an office facing Henry Street.⁷⁸ By 1827 he had equipped the mill with steam power, the first to do so in Limerick, and had become the most efficient and productive miller in the area. He now had a large family – seven sons and two daughters, though two sons and a daughter would die young. In 1824 his eldest son Francis qualified as a barrister, his second son Thompson was twenty-six, and his third son Richard was twenty-four. In the next decade, John Norris added a vast nine-storey store to his mill complex, now known as Newtown Pery Mills and a significant landmark in the city. He also diversified, building ships on the Patent Slip on the North Strand, and becoming, by 1840, a ship owner, in business with his son Richard, with offices in his Henry Street buildings.⁷⁹ One product of the shipyard was *Shelbourne*, a 372-ton wooden barque, which traded in the West Indies and Australia.⁸⁰ By 1846 the business, still recorded as John Norris Russell, had acquired Lock Mills, the other large milling concern in the city, and the important mills at Askeaton, where, after a fire in 1847, the firm installed steam-powered machinery.⁸¹

In the last fourteen years of his life, John Norris continued to look for opportunities to employ new technology and to expand and diversify. In 1850 he was instrumental in setting up the Steam Ship Company, and when, eight years later, it began to suffer because of competition from the railway, he bought up the shares and invested in newer

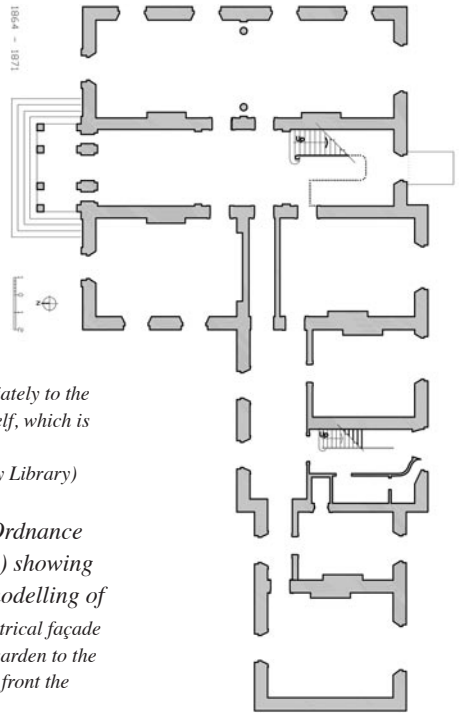
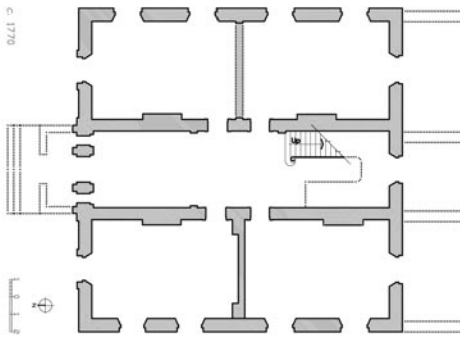
and larger vessels.⁸² The steam ships were particularly valuable in Limerick for importing large quantities of predictably priced coal. In this post-famine period, John Norris constructed a pioneering (for Limerick) flax-spinning and weaving factory on land behind his shipyard at Lansdowne on the North Strand, which was opened in 1853. Built from magnificent blocks of cut limestone, it is an outstanding piece of industrial architecture in the city and a showcase for the skill of mid-nineteenth-century masons. The factory provided steady employment for the younger working population. At this time Russell also acquired the Corbally Lock Mills. By the time he died, aged eighty-five, on 30th April 1859 at his town house in George Street (now O'Connell Street), he had what amounted to a business empire which employed about 2,000 people, contributed significantly to the prosperity of the port, was valued for doing this, and had provided several of the buildings that marked mid-Victorian Limerick as an industrial city.⁸³ He also had a personal reputation for integrity, honour and energy.⁸⁴

Not only had John Norris created a commercial empire, but he had ensured that it would survive beyond his death by drawing his sons into its orbit. This did not apply to Francis, who had graduated from Trinity College Dublin in 1821 and been called to the Irish Bar in 1824. He became an MP for Limerick city, lived in London,⁸⁵ and was disinherited. But Thompson, the second son, ran Askeaton Mill, living in the mill owner's house by the late 1840s. He would be John Norris's heir, taking up residence in the family country house, Faha, Patrickswell, after his father's death.⁸⁶ Arthur, who lived at Lemonfield, was also involved in the milling business.⁸⁷ Richard, who, like Thompson and Arthur, did not go to Trinity, would take on the running of the still-expanding John Norris Russell & Sons after his father's death. By 1870, eleven years after John Norris's death, the company had acquired the large steam-powered mills at Garryowen, as well as the mill at Plassey, and established an iron foundry next to the shipyard on the North Strand.⁸⁸ Richard, who combined a formidable energy and intelligence with reliability and attention to detail, had entered his father's world soon after he reached maturity.⁸⁹ He lived in the city and concentrated on the ship-owning business.⁹⁰ In 1834, at the age of thirty-one, he joined his father in investing in the planned city bridge and proposed harbour by becoming a commissioner.⁹¹ At thirty-nine, he received the freedom of the city. It is highly likely that the impetus shown by John Norris Russell's company (which, apart from the shipping businesses was not recorded in the directories as John Norris Russell & Sons until 1870) was not only supported but generated, in part, by his sons. Certainly Richard Russell, who died only twelve years after his father, had established a separate reputation as an honourable businessman and as a considerate and generous employer. He was so well regarded that a committee was appointed soon after his death to raise money for a memorial, suggesting that his reputation, independent of his father, had been built up over a long period.

However, the death of his father when Richard was fifty-six does seem to have provided impetus and opportunities that were not there before. In 1860 Richard became president of the Chamber of Commerce, in which position, held until his death in 1871,

he was able to instigate improvements to the port and its trade.⁹² It was at this time that he acquired Plassey and commissioned an architect to reinvent the house as an Italian *palazzo*. A project in which large sums of money were expended in reworking a plain Georgian box into a stylistically more elaborate building while gaining extra accommodation, it was typical of its time. The internal reworking did not result in a spectacular addition to the spatial qualities of the house, and the front elevation was disordered. But the new rear elevation, formal and graceful, has distinction, and the plasterwork inside is fine. No record has yet emerged of which architect Russell employed for what, in the context of the region, is an impressive building, and, in the context of Ireland, is an important example of a relatively rare style.⁹³ The house was to be a gentleman's retreat and a family home rather than a summer residence; it was also to be an expression of Russell's achievements and aspirations.⁹⁴ Richard had married Mary Dickinson from Grange, county Limerick, in July 1840, and had three sons and four daughters relatively late in life, so that in 1861, when he was fifty-eight, his second son, Richard Norris was sixteen.⁹⁵ Not uncommonly, the family had suffered terrible tragedy: the eldest son had died at Harrow School and, in 1861, another son, William, and a daughter, Constance, both died of diphtheria. There would be another sorrow when their daughter May died four years later. But there were two daughters to be married, a son and heir to be provided for.

With his alterations to the house and garden, Richard Russell transformed Plassey (Plates 11, 12). The enlarged Georgian house was turned towards the garden, which, with the seventeenth-century buildings demolished and the formal planting removed, became an open, sunny place, directly accessible from the newly stuccoed house.⁹⁶ There was a second walled garden behind this, beyond which was a kitchen garden. After the second phase of building from 1868 to 1871, this area was fronted by an array of glasshouses, accessed by a long axial path that led directly from a small timber and metal bridge over the basement area at the rear hall door of the house (Plates 13, 14). The entrance, given a new porch with Corinthian capitals, remained on the north front, but all the design focus was on the rear where the extension was conceived in such a way that there was a central three-storey block flanked by two, slightly recessed two-storey wings (Plate 15).⁹⁷ The new symmetrical rear façade shifted the centre of the house slightly to the west, although the centre line of the old house was retained in the design of the garden. Another anomaly lay in the fact that this investment and aesthetic achievement was curiously underexposed; the new well-composed façade did not become the entrance elevation and, because of the walled gardens, it was not visible from the approach. Instead, its impact was concentrated within the gardens, where the slightly off-centre long axis channelled a distant view of the well-proportioned rear elevation. Richard Russell and his architect had paid tribute to the inherited picturesque relationship of the house with the demesne by retaining the entrance front on the north, but they were inspired by the idea of the garden when imagining a place of greatest impact. Stables, constructed in rubble stone and planned around two courtyards, were built along the west wall of the kitchen garden.⁹⁸ This was accessed by a secondary drive off the main avenue lined by trees. There was a conservatory with a



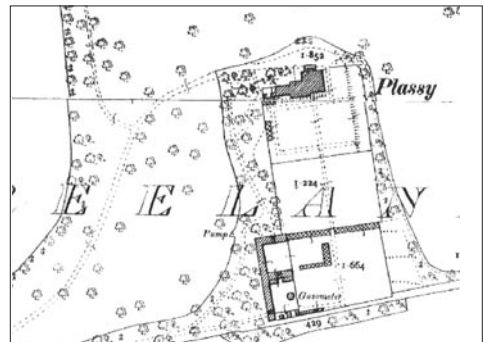
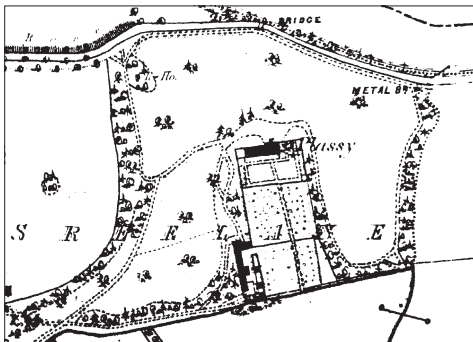
11, 12 – Sections and ground-floor plans of Plassey House, c.1770 and 1864-71

(survey John Duggan; presentation Healy & Partners)

13 – Map accompanying a lease dated July 1868 during the period Plassey was being rebuilt. New stables have been built to the south and a small enclosure

has been built immediately to the south of the house itself, which is being enlarged. (copy in Limerick City Library)

14 – 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map (1900) showing the completed remodelling of the house. A symmetrical façade faces a large walled garden to the rear, and glasshouses front the kitchen gardens.





15 – Rear view of Plassey House
(photo by Kieran Clancy)

curved roof to the west of the house built between 1868 and 1871. At the entrance to the avenue was a modest, symmetrical, vernacular Tudor Revival gate lodge.⁹⁹

Inside, the original house was aggrandised to match the newly conceived *palazzo*. There was a new stair with decorative cast-iron balusters rising from the back of the central hall (Plate 17). The wall between the two ground-floor rooms to the east was taken down, and the enlarged space punctuated in the centre by two pairings of Corinthian column and pilaster, the shafts painted an imitation yellow marble (Plate 16). The ceilings were replastered with modestly elaborate cast schemes. These are characterised by a combination of geometric and organic designs, with each room treated separately, though not without some linking themes – organic ceiling roses unrestrained by borders in the entrance hall and East Room; ivy and oak pattern borders frequently recurring; entrance hall modillions appearing again as one climbs the stairs. In contrast, the ceiling in the entrance hall that is divided into rectangular compartments, and the arabesque-decorated coved ceiling of the square hall it leads into are much more lightly modelled. Off the square-shaped central hall, the East Room has two identical ceilings, with curve-ended rectangular designs at the edge balanced by exuberant ceiling roses and a wide curved cornice, in which *putti* and birds entwined in arabesques give a playful accent to the decoration (Plate 19). The plasterwork here was modelled in such a way that it imitates *in situ* hand



Plassey House

16 – Detail of Corinthian column, pilaster and coving in the East Room

17 – Stair detail

opposite

18 – Detail of the ceiling rose in the East Room

19 – Detail of cornice plaster in the East Room

(photos by Kieran Clancy)





Plassey House

20 – *Detail of a ground-floor front window*
(photo by Kieran Clancy)

21 – *Reform Club House, Pall Mall, London,*
by Sir Charles Barry, 1837-41
(from *SURVEYOR, ENGINEER AND ARCHITECT*, 1840)

opposite

22 – *Dunderave, Bushmills, county Antrim,*
attributed to Charles Lanyon, 1847
(photo by Michael O'Connell)

23 – *The Abbey, Whiteabbey, county Antrim,*
by Charles Lanyon, c 1850
(photo by Michael O'Connell)

modelling, the ceiling roses formed in two parts to give the impression of two layers of relief, and the oak-leaf pattern on the lower part of the cornice applied with a sizable gap behind so that it appears undercut (Plate 18).¹⁰⁰ Where these features give three-dimensional richness through layering and undercutting, borders of spherical fruit and tightly furled flowers above the cornice project to interrupt their enclosing lines, presenting volume through rounded modelling. On the other side of the hall, in what is now the Wood Room, a very different atmosphere is created by a strong geometric diaper pattern which covers the ceiling.

The windows were enlarged on the ground floor. At the back, the sills were lowered to floor level to take full advantage of the garden, and all the openings were widened and fitted with elegant double or triple round-headed lights (Plate 20). These were given decorative cast-iron stops on the central exterior mullions, echoed by carved timber stops on the interior. At least some of the furniture and fittings were high-quality, late-eight-



teenth-century pieces: the Russells had, for example, a 116-piece Chamberlain Worcester dinner service and twenty-seven-piece dessert set, and a collection of Wedgwood Majolica.¹⁰¹

Plassey, as remodelled in the 1860s, is a significant example of the Italian *palazzo* style as established by Charles Barry (1795-1860) for Victorian institutions and mansions in the 1830s and '40s, and as applied in Ireland in the 1840s and '50s by Charles Lanyon (1813-1889). It was Barry's designs for two London clubs – the Travellers' Club (1829-31) and the Reform Club (1837-41) – and the Manchester Athenaeum (1837-39), all of which were illustrated in contemporary architecture journals, which brought the potential of the early sixteenth-century urban Italian palace architecture before Victorian patrons and architects, and established it as an influential stylistic paradigm.¹⁰² The front elevation of the Reform Club, illustrated in *The Surveyor, Engineer and Architect* of 1840, which Barry had based on the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, forcefully demonstrated the

impressiveness of a nine-bay, three-storey structure with aediculated window openings, heavy horizontal banding, well-defined quoins, an elaborate cornice, and a shallow overhanging roof (plate 21). It combined severity, derived from unbroken areas of wall between storeys, with astylar ornamentation in a tall, dignified freestanding block. Barry applied this to country mansions, often by incorporating towers into asymmetric, picturesque compositions (for example, at Trentham Park), something which influenced Thomas Cubitt in his rampant Osbourne House built for Queen Victoria on the Isle of Wight in the 1840s.

Charles Lanyon, who built up a private practice in parallel with his work as Surveyor of county Antrim from 1836 to 1861, showed a marked preference for classical and, particularly, the Italianate *palazzo* style for mansions commissioned by his wealthy northern patrons. Ballywalter Park, with its three-storey central block and flanking pavilions, is the most impressive, but two-storey Dunderave at Bushmills (attributed to Lanyon) and The Abbey at Whiteabbey, also in county Antrim, are perhaps more typical (Plates 22, 23).¹⁰³ Lanyon had been the first to present Barry's *palazzo* style in Ireland when he remodelled the Exchange and Assembly Rooms in Belfast for the Belfast Bank in 1844-46. An architect whose office was lined with both classical and modern books of architecture, Lanyon had been inspired by the north façade of Barry's Travellers' Club in London, which was illustrated in W.H. Leed's *The Travellers Club*, published in 1839. However, a scholarly bent did not get in the way of an inventive interpretation of the style to suit his clients. In both Dunderave and The Abbey there is a relaxed horizontal character, derived from the prominence of the string-courses between the ground and first floor at the centre of the two-storey buildings that distances them from Barry's urban block. Dunderave and The Abbey have no areas of unrelieved wall, and the façades project and recess – all details which radiate comfort and approachability. Lanyon, receptive to client taste for elaboration, displayed an appreciation of the opportunity presented by the Italian *palazzo* style for variation in the treatment of windows, juxtaposing window openings of different design within and between storeys. He also added new forms – a single-storey, flat-roofed porch with Corinthian columns, tripartite windows for the ground floor – and he preferred cornices over his windows to aedicules. The style is recognisably Italian, but he has converted the urban *palazzo* into a relaxed gentleman's residence in a highly identifiable way.

Plassey shares many of the features of Charles Lanyon's country houses (Plate 24). It has a strong horizontal character derived from a pronounced projecting string-course, and a wide decorated wall cornice punctuated by carved eaves brackets and modillions in what – with a hidden basement and, in the main block, an attic storey incorporated into the eaves design – is effectively a two-storey building.¹⁰⁴ The window openings are varied. On the main block of the rear façade there are round-headed triple-light windows decorated with Corinthian pilasters, above which are double camber lights, with carved brackets supporting architraves and roundel decoration in the spandrels (Plate 25). On the front façade are windows with and without pediments, supported on carved



24 – Rear of Plassey House, c.1920, showing the Palladian schema of the Italian palazzo 1864-71 remodelling, and the glasshouse of the same period

brackets (Plate 26). The roofs are shallow and hipped, and there is a single-storey, flat-roofed porch with Corinthian columns on the front. The exact formula of the rear façade, with the Palladian overtones of the advanced central block, is not found elsewhere in Lanyon's known houses, but Ballywalter Park is essentially Palladian in composition. However, Plassey's most appealing feature, the square attic windows placed between the carved eaves brackets, has no equivalent in Lanyon's work nor, indeed, in many other Irish houses (Plate 27).¹⁰⁵ The source for this is most likely Peter Paul Rubens' *Palazzi di Genova*, published in Antwerp in 1622, which depicted late-sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century palaces in Genoa (many on the Strada Nuova, designed by the Perugian architect Galeazzo Alessi and his associates) in plan, section and elevation (Plate 28).¹⁰⁶ These exuberantly decorated Mannerist three-storey urban palace blocks had appealed to Rubens as the self-conscious productions of a newly wealthy elite, and he had hoped with his book to encourage northern merchants to develop a similarly vigorous form of self-expression. It is no coincidence that one of the most unusual features of the Genoese buildings was adapted for the house of a wealthy provincial Irish merchant intent on making his mark.¹⁰⁷

Could Charles Lanyon have been the architect of Plassey? Although the cleverly incorporated attic windows were not a feature of his other houses, they suggest the work



Plassey House

25 – Detail of a first-floor rear window, with attic windows above

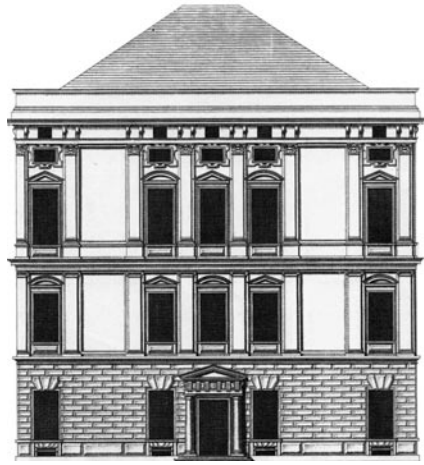
26 – Detail of a first-floor front window

27 – Detail of attic windows within the cornice on the rear façade (photos by Kieran Clancy)

opposite 28 – Front elevation of a late 16th-century Genoese palace from Peter Paul Rubens' *PALAZZI ANTICHI DI GENOVA* (1622).



of an architect with an absorbing and scholarly interest in Italian *palazzi*. Lanyon did work in the south of Ireland, setting up an office with his partner William Henry Lynn, a celebrated draftsman, and his son John in Dublin in 1860.¹⁰⁸ We know that Lanyon designed a new garden front to Stradbally Hall, county Laois, in 1866, and a proposed remodelling of Straffan House, county Kildare, has been attributed to him. Both are in the Italian idiom.¹⁰⁹ Plassey is smaller in scale than Ballywalter Park and Dunderave, and there was less opportunity for the impressive internal spaces he achieved in those buildings. The details over the porch – a pair of round-headed windows with a small pediment above – lack sophistication and fail to fit the vocabulary, however expanded, of Italian *palazzi*, but they may have been added later.



An alternative contender is William Fogerty (c.1833-1878), a Victorian architect working in county Limerick who included a domestic Italian idiom in his eclectic repertoire. He had joined his father's architectural practice in the 1850s. Before (and after) moving to Dublin in the early 1860s, where he would practice until his death in 1878 (apart from brief periods in London and New York), he had worked for several successful Limerick businessmen. He restored South Hill House for Peter Tait, built a villa for Andrew Bannatyne in Ennis, and designed at least two Italianate villas, including (in 1864) Ardhu House for Thomas Revington on North Circular Road (Plate 29).¹¹⁰ This house was considerably smaller than Plassey, and the detailing was scaled down so that it refers to the *palazzo* style rather than embodying it, with a prim dentil cornice, a flat-roofed front porch decorated with pilasters, three-light ground-floor windows with straight heads, and a narrow central string-course. Inside, the staircase and plasterwork bore a family resemblance to Plassey. Apart from his access to the Limerick business elite, his work enlarging, altering and building villas, and his interest in the Italian style, William Fogerty also knew Charles Lanyon, who proposed him as a fellow of the RIBA in January 1868. If Plassey was Fogerty's work, it was his most ambitious and accomplished house. However, the scope of Plassey and its quiet inventiveness is more suggestive of Lanyon. Fogerty may have overseen the construction.

It is notable that because of the relative narrowness of the extension at Plassey (which was stepped back on the front elevation to retain the primacy of the original three-bay entrance front), Richard Russell acquired a proportionately small amount of prime space and a great deal of corridor. This minimal gain can be compared to the substantial investment he had made with his extensive structural and decorative alterations, and to the grandeur of the impact, especially from the garden front. However, the choice of the *palazzo* style did have an element of pragmatism compared to a Gothic Revival style: the



29 – *The front elevation of Ardhu House, North Circular Road, Limerick, by William Fogerty, 1865*
(photo by Kieran Clancy)

exterior could be transformed by adding stucco (no polychromatic bricks and stone, no expensive hood mouldings), and the roof only needed an overhang and new trusses (no gables, no battlements). Despite this proviso, it would seem that although Russell wanted more rooms, making an impression through grandeur and through the associations of the style was more important.

When the Ascendancy reworked or rebuilt their houses in the mid-nineteenth century, they were often tempted to Gothicise them. In county Limerick, Mary and Elizabeth Oliver-Gascoigne replaced an earlier house with a Scottish baronial style castle at Castle Oliver in the 1850s, and in 1867 the 3rd Earl of Limerick engaged E.W. Godwin to design a Gothic castle at Dromore. Even those who had made a fortune as merchants and bankers were not immune: the Barringtons built a Norman Revival castle at Glenstal, begun in 1837 and finished around 1880.¹¹¹ Maurice Craig has argued that, subconsciously, such builders were trying to convince themselves (and everyone else) that their families had been living in that place since time immemorial rather than, as was mostly the case, since the seventeenth century.¹¹² Richard Russell and his architect resisted this at Plassey. Mark Bence Jones has described Lanyon and other architects of Irish country houses in the second half of the nineteenth century (with the notable exceptions of William Henry Lynn and Sir Thomas Newenham Deane) as ‘carrying on the easy-going eclectic tradition of the Morrisons in a Victorian rather than a Georgian manner’.¹¹³ In the light of Craig’s argument, this implies that they felt a continuity with the eighteenth-century past. For a nouveau like Russell, it could suggest a desire to identify with the aristocracy who had made their mark in the eighteenth century. However, if that had been his intention it is more likely that he would have worked with the simple Georgian character of the house he had bought, and retained the historical continuity derived from the seventeenth-century stables and walled garden. Instead, Russell and his architect overlaid seventeenth- and eighteenth-century place-making with a newly fashionable garden, and a house with a much more elaborately decorated exterior than was usual in Irish Georgian domestic architec-

ture. Further, the design referred to a style which, with its association with London clubs, and its use by the newly wealthy in Britain and Northern Ireland, had been accepted as a symbol of the rising power of the upper and middle classes in Britain since the early 1840s. This put Russell in the category of Victorian builders in Ireland who eschewed references to the Grand Tour-inspired Classicism of the aristocracy, or the illusion of longevity supplied by Gothicism, aligning him instead with the moneyed ebullience of the proudly nouveau.

Russell enhanced Thomas Maunsell's picturesque parkland landscape by making it more accessible and increasing the planting. A new serpentine drive bordered with trees joined the recently constructed stables to the main avenue, while another tree-bordered drive was built to link the house to a metal bridge built over the mill stream, no doubt at a landing point.¹¹⁴ This was connected to a riverside path which eventually joined the drive, providing a walk around the perimeter of the estate. A map of 1868 shows a thickly wooded main avenue and west boundary. Thus, despite the transformation of the house and gardens, Russell's Plassey can also be appreciated as a continuation of Maunsell's Plassey. Architectural treatises on picturesque villas had continued to be produced in the first half of the nineteenth century. In them, consensus about the villa had crystallised around a concept that strongly resembled Plassey – in size, between a mansion and a cottage; rural but accessible to a town; with a garden-like demesne and, as often as not, Italian or classical in style. Russell had put himself into the same category as Maunsell, and although his architectural taste was different from his predecessor's, he, like his contemporaries, still delighted in the picturesque landscape.

Whatever effect Plassey had on the standing and image of Richard Russell, when he died aged sixty-eight on the evening of 29th August 1871, having, after nine days' illness, succumbed to the typhus fever that was then epidemic in the city, his reputation explicitly rested on his leadership of John Norris Russell & Sons. The *Limerick Chronicle* described him as a man of ability, probity and kindness.

All his commercial transactions were stamped with regularity and intelligence, while at the same time he was a gentleman in whose honour and fidelity the utmost confidence could be reposed. Amongst the employees of the firm he was highly esteemed as a generous and considerate master, while his charity and benevolence were the theme of universal praise. As a public man Mr Russell's large and practical experience, and sound common sense made him a useful and valuable member of the various boards with which he was connected.

While this might not be said of everyone, it did fit the conventional view of a good and successful businessman in the mid-nineteenth century. The next two sentences probed that image, revealing that Russell had not always been an easy man to deal with, but that he had a redeeming warmth.

Underneath a somewhat earnest and excitable temperament, Mr Russell had a

good, kind heart, and those who differed with him in opinion were always first to bear a willing testimony to this characteristic. Mr Russell was a staunch and faithful friend, and like a thoroughly honest and upright man, he adhered with unbending tenacity to the cause he believed to be right.

The apparently incongruous association of a morally resolute character with what may be regarded as frothy domestic architectural design is a notable aspect of Victorianism and reflects the dichotomy between the public realm run by men and the private realm where feminine qualities and the gentler virtues had expression.

Marks of respect for Russell were displayed within many sections of Limerick society. The altars, reading desks and pulpits of both Kilmurry church near Plassey, where he was a parishioner, and Trinity church on Catherine Street, where he was one of the earliest pew holders, were covered in black cloth for a mourning period, and his death dominated the services: ‘a solemn awe seemed to pervade the congregation at the great loss...’, the *Chronicle* journalist wrote. Both the Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce adjourned meetings in the days immediately after his death.¹¹⁵ His cortege, which travelled from Plassey to St John’s church, where he was interred in the family vault (which, fittingly, perhaps, is immediately adjacent to the Maunsell vault), was followed by the leading citizens and his 500 former employees.¹¹⁶ After a public meeting, a committee was formed to collect a public subscription to erect a testimonial.¹¹⁷ There was a proposal to erect a bronze statue on a pedestal, but mindful that the family wanted the money spent on a public utility, the People’s Park – an extension of Pery Square – was formed in his memory and the fact recorded in stone over the arched entrance. It was opened in August 1877, six years after his death. The employees of Russell’s firm placed a cast-iron drinking fountain in the park, in acknowledgement, the *Limerick Chronicle* reported, for his acts of kindness, sound practical advice, his contribution to the prosperity of the city, and his family’s long involvement in city affairs.

His eldest brother Francis, who died on the same day as Richard, and had represented the city intermittently as an MP since 1852, received significantly less attention. The corporation did acknowledge his promotion of Limerick’s interests – hinting that Francis had had many political differences with the town council – but he was not included in the public subscription. He had lived in London (Lancaster Gate) and been distant from the day-to-day life of the city. Local standing came from tangible local involvement, particularly in the economy of the city.

LATE-NINETEENTH CENTURY AND TWENTIETH CENTURY

AFTER RICHARD’S DEATH IN 1871, HIS SON RICHARD NORRIS (KNOWN AS NORRIS), twenty-six when his father died, inherited Plassey. Unmarried, he would remain a bachelor until his death in 1919 at the age of 74. Instead of joining John Norris Russell & Sons he became a farmer. He had inherited land at Fannin from his father, and

bought a further 620 acres, with nine tenants, at Ballinacarriga, Kildimo, county Limerick, from his uncle Thompson in October 1871.¹¹⁸ Plassey continued to be a gentleman's residence. It was largely self-supporting, with kitchen gardens for vegetables, and animals – cows, pigs and fowl – for meat, milk and eggs. There were four stables, two coach houses and a harness room. Norris played his part locally as a church warden and a Justice of the Peace. Norris's mother died in September 1884, and by 1901 his sister Amy and her husband Richard Sadlier, a retired major general, were living with him at Plassey. They had five servants – a cook, house maid, parlour maid, coachman and groom.

During Norris's time at Plassey, the mill went into decline. Arthur and Thompson Russell bought it from John Norris Russell & Sons in 1874, but competition from cheaper American flour made it less profitable.¹¹⁹ There was also a problem with the water supply. It closed in 1880 and the machinery was removed. There was some hope that it might be used as a woollen mill, but instead it was allowed to decay. It was in ruins by 1929.¹²⁰ In 1956 the empty shell was destroyed with explosives.¹²¹ Today parts of the external walls still stand. The most conspicuous element is the tower, still seven stories, still with much of its stair intact – a landmark above its surrounding trees on the university campus and along the banks of the river.

Norris, who had auctioned the contents of Plassey in September 1903, finally sold the estate to William Wellington Bailey and his wife Blanche in about 1908.¹²² William Bailey had been a very successful rubber planter in Malaysia.¹²³ By the time he left the Far East he was the director of a number of companies, including Highlands & Lowlands and the Sungei Kapar, and was an acknowledged plantation expert. He was also a rich man whose estates were valued at £372,432 gross at the time of his death in 1910. A keen racing man, he had a stud farm at Rathbane, near Limerick, and his horses were trained at the Curragh. In 1908 his horses won twenty races on the Irish Turf, while Bachelor's Double won the Royal Hunt Cup at Ascot in 1910, his most notable achievement. At Plassey, William built more stables and a hay barn in the existing stables courtyards, and was well regarded for providing employment locally, no doubt in his stud farm and stables.¹²⁴

William died in October 1910, bequeathing Plassey to his wife.¹²⁵ She received an annuity of £1,550 a year for life, his bank investments and the racehorses of her choice. Additionally, she was instructed to sell all horses in training and distribute the proceeds to Limerick charities. She remained at Plassey with Isabella Bowes, her private secretary, a cook, parlour maid, housemaid and groom, for twenty-three years.¹²⁶ In May 1911 a local auctioneer, William B. Fitt, made an inventory of the contents of the house, which has given us a vivid picture of Edwardian Plassey.¹²⁷ It was a house with modern fittings and equipment. It was lit by electric light – three- and five-arm electroliers (chandeliers designed for carbon bulbs) in the ground-floor rooms, smaller wall brackets and adjustable chandeliers in the first-floor bedrooms, and single electric pendants in the attic rooms. Fire extinguishers stood in the corridors in compliance with fire insurance. There was a gramophone and an orchestrelle in the hall. Cold water was piped to the baths. There were water closets on each floor, one, on the ground floor, in a room equipped with a dressing table,

toilet glass and wash-hand basin. There was no piped hot water, and the bedroom was still the place to wash. Each bedroom was also supplied with toilet pails – some china with rose decorations and cane handles – for the night.

The rooms were filled with furniture – much of it reproduction eighteenth-century furniture, described by Fitt as ‘Sheraton-style’ or ‘Chippendale-style’ – in a way that would have delighted the Victorian Russells. Every bedroom had its Sheraton-style bedroom suite – large wardrobe, dressing table and wash stand, as well as a writing table, bedside table, chests and numerous chairs. The dining room (now the Wood Room) was probably the most formally classical of the rooms, though there was no obvious stylistic continuity. It had mahogany breakfront sideboards and bookcase, dining table, Chippendale-style chairs, carved overmantle mirror, clock with metal Corinthian pillars, and bronze statuettes, including one of a Roman soldier and another of a cupid.

The proliferation of furniture and ornaments made the house comfortable, as did the curtains and carpets. There were velvet curtains (blue and valuable in the large drawing room) and serge curtains on the ground floor, linen curtains in the bedrooms, and blinds with lace fringes or insertions in all the rooms. Large rugs covered the floors, and the stairs and corridors were carpeted. There was much on display, but nothing of outstanding value, although the Staffordshire china in the ground-floor corridor was described as antique. The pictures were oils or watercolours – landscapes, genre pictures, conversation pieces – by obscure artists. There were plenty of prints, one or two by Hogarth and Angelica Kauffman, and a few of historical subjects, including a print in the Green Bedroom of ‘Lord Clive the Victor of Plassy’. There were no specifically Irish scenes or subjects. The most arresting pictures were probably the set of eight engravings of Rubens’ paintings of Achilles on the first-floor landing. More impressive than the pictures, because of their sheer quantity, were the many display cabinets full of china in all the public rooms. And there were the Turf Club cups that had been presented to William Bailey in Malaysia, many just before his death, and which were displayed in the basement kitchen. Probably the most impressive objects were the animal-skin rugs in the large drawing room (now the East Room) – a six-foot leopard skin with head and tail; a seven-foot polar bear with its head and claws stuffed and a five-foot brown bear. The large drawing room also had a three-foot white marble classical male statue set on an ebonised pedestal table of the same height, which must have stood out despite the twenty tables, eleven chairs, four settees and five cabinets, complementing the marbleised columns that divided the room.

The inventory confirms that the 1860s extension, although it had aggrandised the house from the exterior, had only added a few peripheral rooms inside. The main rooms were still located on the ground floor of the eighteenth-century house – the enlarged drawing room to the left of the hall, the morning room to the front on the right, and the dining room to the rear on the right. In the extension there was a study, house maid’s pantry, office and back stair. Upstairs in the extension there were two bedrooms and a bathroom. The older part of the house contained Mrs Bailey’s suite – a boudoir, bedroom and dress-



30 – North-east corner of Plassey House and garden, c.1910.

ing room all linked and situated at the front of the house over the morning room and porch. There were three other bedrooms and a bathroom. On the top floor were two servants' bedrooms, a boy's room, box room and bathroom, and in the basement were the kitchen and dairy, servants' dining hall, and a servant's bedroom. The inventory also detailed three workmen's houses – the four-room steward's house in the farm yard, the chauffeur's bedroom next to the meter house, and the model cottage with its kitchen and two bedrooms.

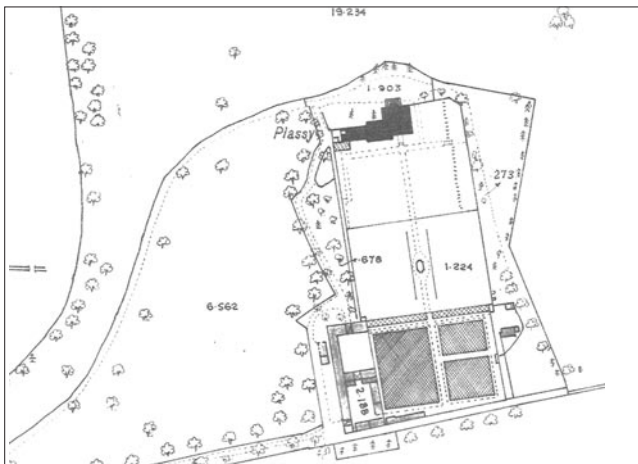
A photograph of the north-east corner of the house and garden taken around 1910 indicates something of the design of the garden and the way it was enjoyed at that time, perhaps when William Bailey was still alive (Plate 30). It is summer, possibly June. The lawn is covered in daisies, the trees are in full leaf. The path that bisected the lawn leading to the glasshouses is clearly visible. Also featured is the small bridge that gives access to the rear hall door. At the base of the steps leading from the bridge is a pair of classical urns. There is another path running east-west across the back of the house, terminating in an additional pair of urns near the east wall of the garden. Mature trees – evergreens and deciduous – can be seen in front of this wall, while the garden itself has been recently set with plants placed on small mound beds, sprinkled with silver sand, lining the paths, and a larger mound bed on the lawn.¹²⁸ A man, two women and three girls (the Baileys with four daughters?) stand on the bridge. Two deckchairs have been left at the corner of the house. It is an open, sheltered garden, formally designed and planted, but used informally. The planting is old-fashioned (mound beds had been popular since the 1860s); however, as it is just planted, it is not a survival but a current enthusiasm. None of the urns remain today, but a white marble classical fountain (possibly Roman), decorated with a beautiful lion's head out of which a single jet of water flows, that stood on the central axis within the walled garden is now set at the front of Plassey House.¹²⁹

Blanche Bailey left Plassey in 1933, auctioning many of the family possessions.¹³⁰

The estate was bought by Patrick Keating, a retired official in the British Colonial Service, who had served in Manchuria.¹³¹ Keating had business interests in Manchuria which he lost when the communists came to power in 1949. At Plassey, he covered the kitchen garden with greenhouses and kept the house in good repair (Plate 31).¹³² After his death in 1961, Plassey was acquired by the National Rehabilitation Institution which cut groves of trees and the Wellingtonia planted in 1815, though the intervention of Donough O'Malley saved some significant trees. The house was also neglected: windows were not repaired, fireplaces were removed, the roof was allowed to decay.

The National Institute of Higher Education (NIHE), the forerunner of the University of Limerick, acquired Plassey in January 1970. The institute had found a site close to Limerick city with ample room for expansion. But it had also found a beautiful and historic setting for the new, predominantly technical institute, and a decision was made to retain the house, mill and as much of the landscape as possible. This was a remarkable attitude at a time when new educational institutions felt that their mission would be most fully expressed in buildings of exclusively contemporary design. Initially, Plassey House became the temporary location of the institute while the first interdisciplinary buildings were being built. The lecturers were given the attic rooms, the basement housed the library, dining room and kitchen, and the rooms on the ground and first floor were used as lecture and seminar rooms. The director was given the room at the front, with the ante-room (Mrs Bailey's boudoir) for his secretary's office. This is still the arrangement for the president and his secretary.

The house was surveyed in October 1970, then restored and converted by Patrick Whelan in 1971. Whelan's concern was to repair the building and make it useable by the institute. He renewed the roof covering, fitting a new roof lantern on the first-floor landing, and made the pediment over the porch safe by re-forming it in reinforced concrete. At a time when fireplaces were deeply unfashionable, especially for institutions, he removed the chimneys, and the fire surrounds and hearth slabs in all the rooms.¹³³ Inside,



31 – Map, c.1971, showing glasshouses covering the kitchen gardens
(courtesy University of Limerick)

he repaired the floor and extended the parquet on the ground floor. He overhauled the windows and doors, and replastered some of the walls. There was little effort to match new with existing materials and there were some losses to the fabric, but this work ensured that the house would continue in use, and the staircase, plasterwork and joinery of the mid-nineteenth-century house have all survived.

The NIHE incorporated the house into the new interdisciplinary building (now the Main Building). It formed one side of the new courtyard, linked to the glass and concrete buildings by transparent corridors at first-floor level. A large Monteray cypress that had stood within the walled garden was retained within the courtyard. Other prominent architectural evergreens, including a spectacular monkey-puzzle tree, were kept on the front lawn, and were, until they died (they have been replaced), a defining feature of Plassey and the university. The house became the administrative centre, with the staff and the president on the first floor, and the ground-floor rooms available for board meetings and public functions. Pictures decorate the walls: the Armitage Collection hangs on the ground floor, and part of the National Self-Portrait Collection can be found in rooms and on the corridors of the first floor.

Plassey House is an intrinsic part of the university, but, retaining its own entrance and connected to the drive, it also has a palpably separate identity. On a campus that has revelled in the building of contemporary structures, Plassey House provides a surprising note of ample nineteenth-century domesticity. Although compared to the house enjoyed by the Russells or the Baileys it is very lightly furnished, the carpets, the plasterwork, the patterned tiled and white stone floors of the entrance, the staircase and the pictures ensure that a significant element of the atmosphere of the former house survives. This individual character, together with the surviving sweep of the demesne parkland, is specifically allied to the university so that Plassey House projects a dimension of the university that a contemporary building and modern landscaping would not have achieved. In turn, the university has provided the context for the latest incarnation of what has proved to be a remarkably robust and adaptable building type, both practically and symbolically.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to John O'Connor, President Emeritus of the University of Limerick, for commissioning me to write a history of the campus; it is from this project that the present article has grown. I am grateful to the University of Limerick for financing the survey of Plassey House, and to the Irish Georgian Society for financing the contemporary photographs of Plassey House. I would like to acknowledge the invaluable help and advice of Ken Bergin, Special Collections Librarian, University of Limerick; Kevin Clancy, Punch Conservation; Kieran Clancy; John Duggan; David Griffin, Irish Architectural Archive; Jaqui Hayes, Limerick City Archives; Brian Hodkinson, Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, Limerick; The Knight of Glin; Richard Ireland; the late Denis Leonard, Limerick Civic Trust; Jennifer Moore, Royal Irish Academy; Michael O'Connell; Finola Reid; Colin Rynne; Matthew Shinnors; and Michael

Murphy, Healy & Partners Conservation. The Ordnance Survey maps are reproduced with the permission of Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland: copyright permit no. MP004509. The drawing from Palazzi di Genova is reproduced with permission of the RIBA Library, books and periodicals collection; the photograph of the rear of Plassey House c.1920 is by courtesy of the Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, Limerick, ref. 1985.0145; the photo of the garden of Plassey House c.1910 is from the Russell Papers, P54/1, Limerick City Archive.

ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

Johnston-Liik, *Irish Parliament* Edith Mary Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament 1692-1800*, 6 vols (Belfast, 2002)
 LCA Limerick City Archives

- ¹ Civil Survey, 1654-56. This provided a record of the extent and value of forfeited land to be allocated to officers and soldiers who had fought in the Commonwealth interest. Down Survey, 1654-59. This map of Ireland was co-ordinated by William Petty after the Civil Survey, also as a prelude to a transfer of land. Spelt Sreylane in the Civil Survey, Sryelane in the Down Survey, Sreelane on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map published in July 1844. The Civil Survey notes that FitzBourke also owned BallynCnocke (*sic*), Bellasymon (Ballysimon), where he lived, and BallyneClohy (Ballyclogh); Ballysimon and Ballyclogh are both townlands listed in Griffiths Valuation of 1851.
- ² John O'Donovan (compiler), *Ordnance Survey Name Book* [1840].
- ³ Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, Limerick, 'A Survey of Newcastle...' by John Grace, 16th July 1772. Millford/Milford, which referred here to the townland, came to refer to the estate. See Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, Russell Papers, Indenture, 6th October 1857, which refers to the 'lands of Milford now called Plassey'.
- ⁴ Colin Rynne, 'The Development of Milling Technology in Ireland, c.600-1875' in Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *Irish Flour Milling: A History 600-2000* (Dublin, 2003) 13-38. He observes that compared to the large numbers of medieval water-powered grain mills shown in documentary sources, there are very few physical remains, and speculates that some may have been absorbed into nineteenth-century mills. This may have been the case for the mill and the mill race at Plassey. The mill is shown on William Eyres' map, 'Draught of the County Round Limerick', c.1752, copy in Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, Limerick.
- ⁵ Johnston-Liik, *Irish Parliament*, V, 219.
- ⁶ *ibid.* Johnston-Liik notes that the abstract of the title commencing with the deed of grant by Francis Pierpoint Burton to Thomas Maunsell in 1763 recites the grant by the trustees of forfeited estates in Ireland dated 19th April 1703.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, III, 324. His family had benefited from Williamite forfeitures: one grandfather, Major-General Henry Conyngham had bought Slane Castle, and the other, Francis Burton, had bought a large part of Lord Clare's estate.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, V, 219; III, 324. 'Survey of Newcastle...', *op. cit.*, dated 1772, names Revd Widenham in association with Milford. 'Mr Widnam', possible the same occupier, is marked on Eyres' map, c.1752, *op. cit.*
- ⁹ Leamanagh, county Clare, and Goresgrove, county Kilkenny, both show medieval castles integrated into later houses that were one room thick. See plans in Niall McCullough, *Palimpsest: Change in*

the Irish Building Tradition (Dublin, 1994) 63. The number of bays given here is based on the size of the long building relative to Plassey House shown on 1844 map. The bays of the older house could be smaller and, therefore, more numerous. Griffith's Valuation for Plassey (a three-bay, two-storey house; see later) in 1851 is very high at £42.0.0. Comparable houses of this size were valued at much lower rates – Knockanglas, a three-bay, two-storey house in county Tipperary, at £18.15.0, and Ashton Grove, a five-bay, two-storey house in county Cork, at £22.0.0. Milford, adjacent to Plassey, was valued at £28.0.0. The high valuation for the buildings at Plassey suggests that the 'offices' were impressive buildings, possibly a former house.

- ¹⁰ The Eyres map, c.1752, op. cit., shows a house in roughly the position of present Plassey House. This may refer to the long block; alternatively, it may refer to the square house. If that was the case, and it had survived, it would give an earlier date for the core of the existing house. The courtyard of the new National Institute of Higher Education (NIHE) building (now the University of Limerick) was possibly inspired by the walled garden, the walls of which still stood in 1971 when the architects visited the site. Certainly the main building broadly follows the outlines of the garden as enlarged in the nineteenth century so that there is a palimpsest of medieval or seventeenth-century design inscribed into the university building.
- ¹¹ Johnston-Liik, *Irish Parliament*, V, 219. John Logan, 'Robert Clive's Irish Peerage and Estate, 1761-1842', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 43, 2003, 1-19: 15.
- ¹² Johnston-Liik gives the date of his baptism as 12th March 1726. He died 23rd July 1814 aged eighty-eight, Obituary, *Limerick Chronicle*, 27th July 1814, also implying a birth date of 1726. *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, 23rd July 1814, says Maunsell died aged eighty-two, making his date of birth 1732.
- ¹³ His wife was Margaret, co-heiress of Thomas Twigg of Donnybrook Castle and Puckstown, county Dublin. The family had purchased 144 acres in the county in 1702-03 from the commissioners for sale of forfeited estates. Johnston-Liik, *Irish Parliament*, V, 220.
- ¹⁴ He was Richard Maunsell of Ballywilliam. He was only five years younger than Thomas's son, Thomas of Plassey.
- ¹⁵ Johnston-Liik, *Irish Parliament*, V, 218. He entered TCD on 20th June 1745, but there is no record of him graduating.
- ¹⁶ Logan, 'Robert Clive's Irish Peerage and Estate', 15.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, quoting from a secret committee memo from Fort St George to Colonel Clive, 13th October 1756.
- ¹⁸ The name was spelt Placis in Clive's letters, Plassy on the 1844 and 1900 maps, and Plassey in histories of Clive of India and by the University of Limerick. It was derived from the Palas trees of the area. according to Robert Harvey, *Clive, the Life and Death of a British Emperor* (London, 1998) 210.
- ¹⁹ There is a reproduction of a watercolour (1801) by James Hunter in Percival Spear, *Master of Bengal: Clive and his India* (London, 1975) 90.
- ²⁰ Among these was the fact that Siraj's most effective and loyal general was killed early on and several of his other generals proved to be traitors.
- ²¹ One was published in the *London Magazine* in 1760.
- ²² Logan, 'Robert Clive's Irish Peerage and Estate', 15.
- ²³ 12th August 1759, quoted in *ibid.*
- ²⁴ Quoted in Johnston-Liik, *Irish Parliament*, V, 218.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, 219. In 1776 he bought Granard, county Longford, for himself. It was no coincidence that the man to whom he had been a guardian, John Kilpatrick, an Anglo-Indian, bought the other seat in Granard in the 1776 election. Nor that when Kilpatrick died three years later it was Maunsell's

brother-in-law, the English barrister William Kingsman, who had married Thomas's sister Dorothea in 1762, who was returned for Granard.

- ²⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 218.
- ²⁷ Maunsell was King's Counsel in 1767 and Bencher of the Honourable Society of King's Inns from 1768 until his death in 1778.
- ²⁸ Poynings' Law required that the Irish parliament confirm statutes made in England.
- ²⁹ The Peace of Paris ended the Seven Years War in 1763 and left Britain with territories in Canada and the West Indies with substantial Catholic populations.
- ³⁰ John Ferrar, *The Limerick Directory, containing accurate and complete lists...* (Limerick, 1769).
- ³¹ *ibid.*
- ³² See Eoin O'Kelly, *The Old Private Banks and Bankers of Munster* (Cork, 1959).
- ³³ See R.G. Maunsell, *History of Maunsell...* (Cork, 1903). Robert was Chief of the Council of Gangam, then Governor. He was also a member of the Supreme Council of India. The famine was probably the famine of 1770-72, which devastated Bengal but did not reach Ganjam.
- ³⁴ Both houses were demolished in 1951.
- ³⁵ Obituary, *Limerick Chronicle*, 1st February 1832. He represented the family when his brother Thomas died without a son.
- ³⁶ His father had been Lord Mayor of London (1760-61). Blakiston lived in Shropshire but had a house at Wightfield, county Limerick. He had succeeded to the title Baronet Blakiston of London on 14th July 1774.
- ³⁷ O'Kelly, *Banks and Bankers of Munster*, 102-07.
- ³⁸ Maurice Lenihan, *History of Limerick* (1866; reprinted Cork, 1991) 386.
- ³⁹ 27th July 1814. He was buried in an underground vault within the graveyard of St John's Church, Limerick, immediately to the north-east of the church.
- ⁴⁰ A lease of January 1796 refers to Plassey and Milford 'with the dwelling houses built thereon' containing forty-three acres. (Included in documents for the sale of the rental of the lands of Plassy and Milford, 3rd July 1868, copy in Limerick City Library.) The entire estate was originally named Milford, and Milford is marked on Taylor and Skinner, *Maps of the Roads of Ireland*, surveyed in 1777 and published in 1778, and in the second corrected edition of 1782. In this latter edition, Thomas Maunsell is listed as a subscriber. This suggests, though not conclusively, that what became known as Plassy House was built before 1777. Later, when a second house was built, that building was given the name Milford and part of former Milford was renamed Plassey. A lease of 1st May 1799 describes Plassy as owned by Thomas Maunsell and Milford as owned by George Maunsell, who was his cousin. (Included in documents for the sale of the rental of the lands of Plassy and Milford, 3rd July 1868, copy in Limerick City Library.) The house may have been built for Thomas Maunsell's marriage in 1769. Alternatively, he may have retained an existing house that stood there in the mid-eighteenth century (see note 9). John O'Donovan in the *Ordnance Survey Name Book* states that Plassey House was built in 1819 by Major Maunsell (who would succeed Thomas at Plassey). This is possible: the dwellings referred to in the 1796 lease could be the long buildings shown on the 1844 map. However, it is far more likely that Thomas would have spent money building a new house facing the river, which he then named Plassey, rather than merely naming existing buildings attached to a walled garden. O'Donovan stated that the house was three-storey and measured seventy-two by forty feet (21.9 x 12.2 m) which is radically different from the measured size of the original building, 18.5 x 18.5 m (without accounting for rear extensions.), suggesting that his sources were inaccurate.
- ⁴¹ The subsequent mid-nineteenth-century extension to the house was designed to accommodate this block. See below.

- ⁴² Valuation Office records note that in 1864 a floor was added, implying that the original house was two-storey. Three-bays and two storeys was a common formula. Illustrated examples include Wilfort House in Shankill, county Dublin, in a maritime setting in Peter Pearson, *Between the Mountains and the Sea* (Dublin, 1998) 38; Crossdrum, county Meath, a two-storey-over-basement house with chimneys on the interior spine walls; Croney Byrne, county Wicklow, in Mark Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses* (London, 1978; 2nd revised edn., 1990) 95.
- ⁴³ The present East Room was formed from two rooms. The present Board Room was remodelled in the mid-nineteenth century to allow for a corridor into the extension.
- ⁴⁴ I am grateful to Richard Ireland for insights into the plasterwork of Plassey House.
- ⁴⁵ There are similar fireplaces in the Chamber of Commerce on O'Connell Street, Limerick, and the 1837 tontine terrace on Pery Square.
- ⁴⁶ Insight from Richard Ireland.
- ⁴⁷ This discovery of the picturesque in the Irish landscape was a common theme in Irish landscape design. See Edward Mallins and The Knight of Glin, *Lost Demesnes: Irish Landscape Gardening 1660-1845* (London, 1976).
- ⁴⁸ A lease dated 1799 describing a piece of land set apart for the avenue is included in the documents for the sale of the rental of the lands of Plassy and Milford, 3rd July 1868, copy in Limerick City Library.
- ⁴⁹ For discussion and list of these see John Archer, *The Literature of British Domestic Architecture 1715-1842* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985). I am grateful to David Griffin for referring me to this book.
- ⁵⁰ A similar pattern of building can be seen in Cork Harbour, with houses such as Glanmire and Lota Beg standing in a picturesque setting, and on the outskirts of Dublin.
- ⁵¹ Logan, 'Robert Clive's Irish Peerage and Estate, 3-9.
- ⁵² LCA, Indenture, 6th October 1857. The trustees of the will were Robert Maunsell (probably Thomas's brother) and William Gabbett. Thomas left land and property in North and South Glenagoun (Glenquin barony), Galbally (Clanwilliam barony), Ballygibb (Coshlea barony), Cloghodolorty (Small County barony), all in county Limerick, Rockville, county Tipperary, and houses in Limerick city and Capel Street, Dublin. See Statement of Title, Richard Maunsell esq. in LCA.
- ⁵³ Settlement for the marriage was dated 14th July 1816, see LCA, Indenture, 6th October 1857.
- ⁵⁴ The bank was now known as Kennedy, Maunsell & Carleton.
- ⁵⁵ There was an advertisement in the *Limerick Chronicle*, March 1821, for the sale of seven houses in George's (now O'Connell) Street, property of Robert Hedges Maunsell, cited in O'Kelly, *Banks and Bankers of Munster*, 107.
- ⁵⁶ LCA, Indenture, 13th September 1823.
- ⁵⁷ LCA, Indenture, 6th October 1857.
- ⁵⁸ LCA, Indenture, 13th September 1823.
- ⁵⁹ P. Fitzgerald and J.J. McGregor, *The History, Topography and Antiquities of the County and City of Limerick*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1826-27) record Robert Hedges Maunsell as living at Plassey. Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1837) records Reuben Harvey as living at Plassey. Elizabeth is described as the wife of Robert Hedges of Beakestown House in 1857, LCA, Indenture, 6th October 1857. Robert Hedges still lived at Beakestown in 1862, *Cork Examiner*, 27th October 1862, notice of his son Richard's marriage to the daughter of Richard Lowe of Ballinahinch, county Tipperary, at St George's Church.
- ⁶⁰ Lenihan, *History of Limerick*, 465, states that he built the mill in 1824. *Limerick Chronicle*, 3rd February 1841, mentions that Major Maunsell constructed the mill about twenty years previously, and

the canal, at great expense. O'Donovan, *Ordnance Survey Name Book*, states that he built the mill in 1819 for £2,100, and that it was seven storeys and measured sixty by forty-five feet. See p.88 here for the older mill.

- ⁶¹ Andy Bielenberg, 'A Survey of Irish Flour Milling, 1801-1922' in Bielenberg (ed.), *Irish Flour Milling*, 57-85: 60.
- ⁶² There is no record of which engineer and architect were involved in the design of the mill and canal.
- ⁶³ Colin Rynne, 'An Archaeological Survey of Plassey Mills, Co Limerick, with Recommendations on Conservation/Restoration Work' (1994; unpublished), copy in University of Limerick.
- ⁶⁴ Probably all the fenestration facing the house was decorated with label mouldings. Only the tower mouldings are still visible, but there are the remains of mouldings above windows on a fragment of wall adjacent to the tower.
- ⁶⁵ Now that the mill is a ruin, there is an even closer resemblance. Rynne, 'An Archaeological Survey of Plassey Mills', 10 and appendix, speculated that the tower, which is butt-jointed to the main building, was the survival of a late-eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century Gothic Revival house. There are a number of reasons why this is highly improbable. It is unlikely that such a structure would have been so quickly converted into a mill. Rynne did not take into account that the Gothic Revival features were not confined to the tower. Lastly, a mildly Gothic Revival accent was not, as I try to show, unlikely in an early nineteenth-century mill set in the grounds of a small estate.
- ⁶⁶ Niall McCullough and Valerie Mulvin, *A Lost Tradition* (Dublin, 1987) 95-96.
- ⁶⁷ *The Pleasure Grounds, Ballinrobe* (c.1818) and *Ballinrobe House* (c.1818), both in the National Gallery of Ireland (NGI), and discussed in Vera Kreilkamp, 'Painting Mayo's Landscape: The Big House, the Pleasure Grounds, and the Mills' in Vera Kreilkamp (ed.), *Éire/Land* (Boston, 2003) 71-78. There is another painting by O'Connor entitled *The Mill, Ballinrobe* (c.1818), also NGI.
- ⁶⁸ It is now a ruin, burnt in c.1920.
- ⁶⁹ Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary*. Tithe Applotment Book, 1839, lists Reuben Harvey as the owner, leasing land from Major Maunsell, though George Maunsell is listed as the landlord. O'Donovan, *Ordnance Survey Name Book* states that Major Maunsell let Sreelane to Captain Stackpool (who lived at Milford) and James Harvey by lease for three lives and thirty-one years.
- ⁷⁰ Michael Hctor, 'The Contribution of Limerick Docks to the Commercial Development of Limerick', David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Made in Limerick*, 2 vols (Limerick, 2003) I, 92-105.
- ⁷¹ *Limerick Chronicle*, 3rd February 1841. In the early 1830s, Reuben Harvey & Sons imported the French burr stones used in larger mills, Rynne, 'An Archaeological Survey of Plassey Mills', 6-7.
- ⁷² William Hogg, *The Millers and The Mills of Ireland of About 1850* (Dublin, 1998) 86. He uses the Valuation Office Mill Book Records c.1835-40.
- ⁷³ *Limerick Chronicle*, 3rd February, 1841.
- ⁷⁴ The new valuation for the buildings was £110, Griffith's Valuation, 1851. Rynne, 'An Archaeological Survey of Plassey Mills', 9.
- ⁷⁵ Valuation Office Records. The immediate lessor was the trustees of Mrs Hedges Maunsell.
- ⁷⁶ *ibid.* The valuer's notes for 1864-65 read, 'Mr Russell has laid out a large sum on the improvement of this Ho. This Ho was raised by 1 storey since the primary work was done.' In 1870 he added, 'Valuation has been low a splendid house good app[artments] and large conservatories all in good style.' The conservatories and gate lodge did not appear on the map that accompanied the auction of the lease in July 1868, copy in Limerick City Library. Milford was also expanded in 1864 and a gate lodge was built there in 1870.
- ⁷⁷ Lenihan, *History of Limerick*, 466n-68n.
- ⁷⁸ Jim Kemmy and Larry Walsh, *Limerick in Old Picture Postcards* (Zaltbommel, 1997). *Pigot's*

- Directory* (1824) registered John Norris Russell as a merchant in Shannon Street. His wife was Maria, daughter of John Thompson of Cahirgariff.
- ⁷⁹ *Triennial Directory* (1840). Richard is listed separately. Both father and son were registered in Henry Street.
- ⁸⁰ Hoctor, 'The Contribution of Limerick Docks to the Commercial Development of Limerick', 100.
- ⁸¹ *Limerick Reporter*, 12th March, 1847; *Limerick Chronicle*, 13th March 1847. Also see letter from Thompson Russell, Abbey Lodge, Askeaton to *Limerick Chronicle*, 15th March 1847. Here the firm is titled John Norris Russell & Sons.
- ⁸² Lenihan, *History of Limerick*, 466n-68n. Lenihan ascribes this activity to John Norris himself, whom he would have known.
- ⁸³ See Lawrence photographs of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century in the National Library of Ireland.
- ⁸⁴ *Limerick Chronicle*, Saturday evening, 30th April 1859. His funeral was on 5th May 1859.
- ⁸⁵ *Alumni Dublinensis*. Dates given for the years he served as an MP in *Burke's Irish Family Records* (London, 1976) are 1852, 1857, 1859 and 1865.
- ⁸⁶ *Slater's Directory* (1870).
- ⁸⁷ In 1874 Arthur and Thompson would buy Plassey Mill from Messrs Russell & Sons, Valuation Office Records.
- ⁸⁸ *Slater's Directory*.
- ⁸⁹ Obituary, *Limerick Chronicle*, 29th August 1871.
- ⁹⁰ LCA, Indenture, January 1845 of land purchase in Fannin, county Limerick by Richard Russell gives his address as the city of Limerick. Richard received a separate entry from his father in the local directories in 1840 when he was thirty-seven.
- ⁹¹ Wellesley Bridge was opened in 1835 and the port opened in September 1853. See Hoctor, 'The Contribution of Limerick Docks to the Commercial Development of Limerick', 100. He was also on a number of public boards in the city, for example, a medical board, *Limerick Chronicle*, 12th September 1871.
- ⁹² The president of the Chamber of Commerce was chosen by the Chamber of Directors. *Limerick Chronicle*, 21st August 1877. I am grateful to the late Denis Leonard for pointing out this article to me. A graving dock for ship repair was opened in 1873, which Richard may have promoted.
- ⁹³ It is surprising that Plassey was not recorded in *The Builder* or *The Dublin Builder*. As already noted, the Valuation Records record that Mr Russell had laid out a large sum on improvements between 1864 and 1865, raising the house by a storey and building new offices – the stables. The estate map dated to 1868 gives a general impression of the new work, implying perhaps, that it was still being built. The Valuation Record for 1871 remarks that the valuation was low for such a splendid house, implying that the house was finally complete. New conservatories had been built 'in good style'. Russell also improved the mill by adding a new wheel pit and tail race channel to the south wall, Rynne, 'An Archaeological Survey of Plassey Mills'. Russell died a moderately wealthy man, his effects valued at under £9,000, National Archives, *Calendar of grants of probate and letters of administration, 1872* (Dublin, 1873).
- ⁹⁴ Richard Russell's funeral started at Plassey House.
- ⁹⁵ LCA, marriage settlement dated 23rd July 1840, and Sadleir, Dring and Finch to several (Declaration), August 1920.
- ⁹⁶ This was done in stages. Firstly, new stables were built at a distance to the house, to the west of the furthest walled garden. Then the old stables were demolished and a small walled garden formed to the rear of the enlarged house. This is shown on the map that accompanied the auction of the lease

- in July 1868, copy in Limerick City Library. Later the wall that replaced the buildings was demolished and another built further back to make the larger garden to the rear of the house. See 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map, 1900.
- ⁹⁷ See early twentieth-century photograph, LCA, uncatalogued Russell box, P54/1, and Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum, Limerick, mid-twentieth-century photograph.
- ⁹⁸ The map that accompanied the auction of the lease in July 1868, copy in Limerick City Library, reveals that they were not completed at this time. The first courtyard was substantially retained by the University of Limerick but the second courtyard buildings were demolished.
- ⁹⁹ Survey drawing 1971, University of Limerick. It had pointed arches to the window lights and door, hood mouldings over the door, decorated barge boards, and a dormer over the central bay. There were three rooms and a central hall. It has been demolished. Photograph in the University of Limerick collection.
- ¹⁰⁰ I am grateful to Richard Ireland for pointing this out to me. Evidence in the roof space suggests that the lath and plaster ceilings were re-formed in the 1860s in the same position that they had occupied in the eighteenth century.
- ¹⁰¹ Auction advertisement, *Irish Times*, 11th September 1903.
- ¹⁰² For an assessment of Charles Barry and his place in Victorian architecture, see Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Early Victorian Architecture in Britain* (London, 1954).
- ¹⁰³ Ballywalter Park, designed in 1846 for the mill owner Andrew Mulholland, was a smaller house that was enlarged and refashioned, the front relocated, wings added, the staircase with its elaborate cast-iron balusters top-lit and decorated with niches containing marble statues. Work on Dunderave, the grandest nineteenth-century house in Antrim, designed for Edmund Macnaughten whose father had made a fortune in India, started in 1847. Lanyon designed Whiteabbey c.1850 for Richard Davison, an MP, and later lived there himself. For illustrations and discussion of The Abbey and Dunderave, see C.E.B. Brett, *Buildings of County Antrim* (Belfast, 1996). For a review of Lanyon's work, see Paul Larmour, 'Sir Charles Lanyon', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook 1989-90* (Dublin, 1989), 200-06. Jacob Owen was the first to use the Italianate style in Ireland when he designed the Female Training School, Talbot Street, Dublin in 1842, although he applied it with less interest and understanding here than Lanyon would do.
- ¹⁰⁴ Evidence in the roof in the eighteenth-century part of the house shows that the walls were raised and new king-post roof trusses installed to accommodate the Italianate eaves detailing and the lower pitch. These trusses echoed the trusses used over the mid-nineteenth-century extension. The nineteenth-century trusses were constructed in pitch pine, and there was an iron strap with flat-headed bolts reinforcing the joint between the king post and the tie beam. There is some evidence that older, eighteenth-century material from the original house was reused in the construction of some of these trusses. The ceiling joists were hung from the trusses with roughly made timber hangers. All the roofs were given new rafters, felt and slates in 1971. I am indebted to Kevin Clancy, engineer, and Matthew Shinnors, architect, for their insights into the roof construction.
- ¹⁰⁵ The only example I have come across is St Anne's, Clontarf, remodelled by J.F. Fuller c.1880 (now demolished), which David Griffin remembers as having attic windows incorporated into the eaves on the rear façade.
- ¹⁰⁶ I am grateful to the Knight of Glin for suggesting this source. The book had many reprintings. The most recent reissue is Rubens, *Palazzi Antichi di Genova* and *Palazzi Moderni de Genova* (New York and London, 1968) with an introductory essay by Alan A. Tait.
- ¹⁰⁷ The windows were adapted: in Genoa they were placed singly above the lower windows, whilst in Plassey they are grouped in threes over the double and triple lights of, respectively, the first and

- ground floors. On the front façade there are two attic windows over single windows.
- ¹⁰⁸ Lanyon, Lynn & Lanyon. The partnership ended in 1872. For an account of Lynn's work, see Martyn Anglesea, 'The Lynn Brothers, Architect and Sculptor', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook 1989-90* (Dublin, 1989) 254-62.
- ¹⁰⁹ For Stradbally Hall, see Mark Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses* (London, 1978; 2nd revised edn., 1990) 265, and *An Introduction to the Architectural Heritage of County Laois* (Dept of the Environment and Local Government, Dublin, 2002) 37. For Straffan House, see David Griffin and Simon Lincoln, *Drawings from The Irish Architectural Archive* (Dublin, 1993) 62.
- ¹¹⁰ *Dictionary of Irish Architects, 1720-1940*, Irish Architectural Archive, www.dia.ie. The Ardhu is described in *The Dublin Builder*, 1st March 1865, 62.
- ¹¹¹ This had also been the case in the earlier nineteenth century. In county Limerick, the 25th Knight of Glin had added battlements to Glin House c.1820-36, renaming it Glin Castle, and in 1833 the back façade of classical Ash Hill was rebuilt in the Gothic style and given two towers so that the house was renamed Ash Hill Towers.
- ¹¹² Maurice Craig, *The Architecture of Ireland* (London, 1982; paperback edition 1989) 248.
- ¹¹³ Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses*, xx.
- ¹¹⁴ The original lease specified a right to a landing point, auction, 1868; copy in Limerick City Library.
- ¹¹⁵ *Limerick Chronicle*, 31st August 1871.
- ¹¹⁶ Funeral on 1st September 1871, *Limerick Chronicle*, 2nd September 1871.
- ¹¹⁷ *Limerick Chronicle*, 21st August 1877.
- ¹¹⁸ LCA, Indentures, uncatalogued Russell box. He was described as a farmer and JP in the census of 1901.
- ¹¹⁹ Bielenberg, 'A Survey of Irish Flour Milling, 1801-1922', 69.
- ¹²⁰ Valuation Office Record, margin notes.
- ¹²¹ University of Limerick archives, Letter from Kevin Hannan to Ed Walsh, 11th February 1993.
- ¹²² Auction advertisement, *Irish Times*, 11th September 1903.
- ¹²³ Obituary, *Irish Times*, 5th October 1910.
- ¹²⁴ 1911 census. Valuation Office Records. *Irish Times*, 5th October 1910.
- ¹²⁵ *Irish Times*, 29th November 1910.
- ¹²⁶ 1911 census.
- ¹²⁷ The inventory is in Limerick City Museum. It was specifically made for the deceased W.W. Bailey's possessions.
- ¹²⁸ I am grateful to Finola Reid for observations about the planting.
- ¹²⁹ A photograph in the university collection taken c.1970 shows the fountain in the centre of the walled garden.
- ¹³⁰ *Irish Times*, 15th July 1933. Blanche Bailey died on 12th April 1956 at Cleggan, county Galway, aged eighty-five, *Irish Times*, 13th April 1956.
- ¹³¹ Valuation Office Records, 1935. He held it in fee from 1937. Information on P. Keating from Tom Toomey, 'Landmarks Part 2 Plassey House', *Castletroy Times*, May 1996, 8-9.
- ¹³² Valuation Office Records, and 1971 map, University of Limerick.
- ¹³³ University of Limerick, construction drawings, March 1971.