



# Reassessment of the development of Oldbridge House, county Meath

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OLDBRIDGE HOUSE, LOCATED APPROXIMATELY THREE MILES WEST OF THE PORT TOWN of Drogheda, overlooks the fertile lands and river of the Boyne valley (Plates 2, 3). Its location, built on the site of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, gave the house a prominence that it may not have otherwise deserved. From its acquisition in the 1720s, Oldbridge was home to the Coddington family. As landlords and politicians, the Coddingtons maintained their prosperity through land-ownership and marriage within the landed classes. During the three centuries that they dwelt there, the family's fortunes varied. In the eighteenth century they remained well off, with a sizeable estate and special reserved access to the salmon fishing weirs on the Boyne canal, the routing of which was facilitated by them. This prosperity lasted into the early nineteenth century, allowing for the remodelling of the house in the 1820s and 1830s. However, their fortunes began to decline when income from rentals fell dramatically during the Great Famine and the subsequent agricultural depression of the 1880s.<sup>1</sup> They continued at Oldbridge through the Irish Civil War and Free State periods, notwithstanding IRA activity in the vicinity. The Boyne Obelisk situated on the estate, erected between 1736 and 1737 to commemorate King William III's victory at the Boyne and which stood in close proximity to the house, was blown up in 1923.<sup>2</sup> In the 1980s, the house was targeted by intruders, purportedly the Provisional IRA, when the family's belongings, including old family portraits, were stolen, and have yet to be recovered.<sup>3</sup> It was at that point that the Coddingtons decided to leave Ireland, and in 1984 sold the house and its contents.<sup>4</sup> After a number of successive owners, Oldbridge, together with 400 acres, was purchased in 2000 by the Office of Public Works.<sup>5</sup> It underwent extensive restoration works, opening in 2008 as a visitor centre with the aim of catering 'for different identities and traditions in the context of the Northern Ireland Peace Process'.<sup>6</sup> Its purpose to promote reconciliation and mutual understanding was made manifest when it was formally opened by the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, and the Northern Ireland First Minister, Ian Paisley.<sup>7</sup>

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1 – Joseph Tudor (1695-1759), *THE OBELISK ON THE BOYNE*

c.1736, oil on canvas, 104 x 128 cm (detail; see page 39)

(reproduction by kind permission of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (on loan to Hillsborough Castle))



*2, 3 – Oldbridge House, front and rear façades  
(photos by the author)*



The visitor centre and museum occupy the ground floor of the house, and focuses primarily on the Battle of the Boyne, contextualising it within the broader perspective of seventeenth-century Irish and European history. While elements of the demesne have been impressively restored, including the walled garden, the octagonal sunken garden with its ring of yew trees, dog kennels, gardener's bothy and double peach house, the absence of literature about the house itself is conspicuous. Only the ground floor is currently accessible to the public, while the history of the house's development and that of the Coddington family is confined to a number of wall panels in the bothy. A new conservation management plan for the site is currently being undertaken for the Office of Public Works, which may lead to more of the house and its history being presented to the public. This article aims to shed new light on the development of the house and demesne by examining the surviving archival sources.

The hinterland of Drogheda in the eighteenth century was dotted by a number of large, ambitious country houses, including Beaulieu House, Platten Hall and Townley Hall, with Mount Hanover, Carstown, Tankardstown, Dowth Hall and Slane Castle slightly further afield. In 1724 John Coddington leased Oldbridge from Henry Moore, 4th Earl of Drogheda.<sup>8</sup> The Coddingtons, originally from Holmpatrick in Skerries, county Dublin, had some existing associations with the area, as John Coddington's grandmother had lived in Drogheda, and both his father and uncle had fought for William III at the Boyne in 1690.<sup>9</sup> The house which John Coddington leased in 1724 was a post-medieval gabled building which existed in 1690 and can be seen in an etching by the war artist Dirk Maes, alias Theodor Maas (Plate 4).<sup>10</sup> It has been proposed that the Dutch artist Jan Wyck used this etching to paint a similar scene, including the house and an adjacent village (Plate 5).<sup>11</sup> Coddington married Frances Osborne in 1712 and the couple were living at Oldbridge from 1724.<sup>12</sup> A few years earlier, in 1719, Frances's sister, Anne, married Arthur Dobbs, MP for Carrickfergus (1726-60), Surveyor General of Ireland (1734-43), and later governor of North Carolina (1754-65).<sup>13</sup> It is unknown if Dobbs had any influence on the development of Oldbridge, though it appears that he had a hand in the design of his own large country house and landscape park at Castle Dobbs, county Antrim.<sup>14</sup> John Coddington regarded his brother-in-law highly, specifying that after his death Dobbs should have his land-surveying tools, including a water level and brass semi-circles besides other legacies. Clearly he was aware of Dobbs' interests in surveying and improving land.<sup>15</sup>

Coddington's principal contribution to Oldbridge was the development of its demesne. Soon after his death in 1740, an advertisement to lease the house and demesne of 140 acres appeared in the *Dublin Journal*, itemising recent improvements:

To be let, the house and gardens and demesne of Oldbridge, lately the estate and seat of John Coddington, and now of his widow; it is pleasantly situated on the River Boyne, within one mile and a half of Drogheda, whence is a Turnpike Road to Dublin. The Demesne, with the house, out houses and garden, contains about 140 plantation acres of choice land, all enclosed by the River Boyne, and a Stone Wall, and all very finely improved, and divided into parks, with Inclosures [*sic*] and gates and Peen to each park, all in good repair with excellent meadows; there



4 – Dirk Maes (als. Theodor Maas) (1659-1717)

THE VICTORY OF KING WILLIAM III AT THE BATTLE OF THE BOYNE, 1ST JULY 1690  
etching, 53 x 105.5 cm (National Gallery of Ireland)

are all manner of houses and outhouses fit for any gentleman, all in good repair; the gardens contain variety of Flowers, Fruits, Gravel and Grass-Walks, and fine Hedges and are beautify'd by an obelisk on the opposite side of the River. There is a beautiful octagonal Fruity [*sic*] in which is a very fine green-house adorned with statues, and stock'd with a variety of choice greens, and exotic plants; the fruity is well planted with choice wall-trees, and adorned with a variety of gravel and Grass-walks, with beautiful sloapes [*sic*], descents and espallores [probably espaliers]. Enquire of Captain Dixie at Drogheda.<sup>16</sup>

In his will, Coddington allowed his wife, Frances, use of Oldbridge until her death, which was not until 1747, at which point the house and lands passed directly to his nephew and heir, Dixie Coddington.<sup>17</sup> However, the 1740 advertisement indicates that Frances Coddington removed from Oldbridge on her husband's death, and appears to have occupied a town house on West Street in Drogheda.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, there are no surviving records to show who, if anyone, leased Oldbridge. It may well have been Dixie who leased the house. He was certainly resident there by 1750.<sup>19</sup>

Dixie Coddington is believed to have been responsible for initiating the building of the current house. He was a prominent local figure, becoming a freeman of the nearby borough of Dunleer in 1742, a Burgess in 1750, and ultimately its sovereign in 1755.<sup>20</sup> In 1754, he married Catherine Burgh, daughter of Thomas Burgh, MP of Lanesborough. In 1762, he became MP for Dunleer, though as Anthony Malcomson makes clear, he was not particularly politically ambitious.<sup>21</sup> His most important contribution to the landscape aside from Oldbridge was as a commissioner for carrying on the Boyne Navigation.<sup>22</sup>

It has been suggested that the present house was built around 1750.<sup>23</sup> This attribution is supported by the discovery in the 1960s of a piece of baseboard from the staircase when repairs were then being carried out, which has the following inscription: 'December 1836: Patrick Kelly of the City of Dublin / Put up these Staircases. I worked at this building

from April till now. / 86 years from the first / Building of this house till now as we see by a stick like this found.’<sup>24</sup>

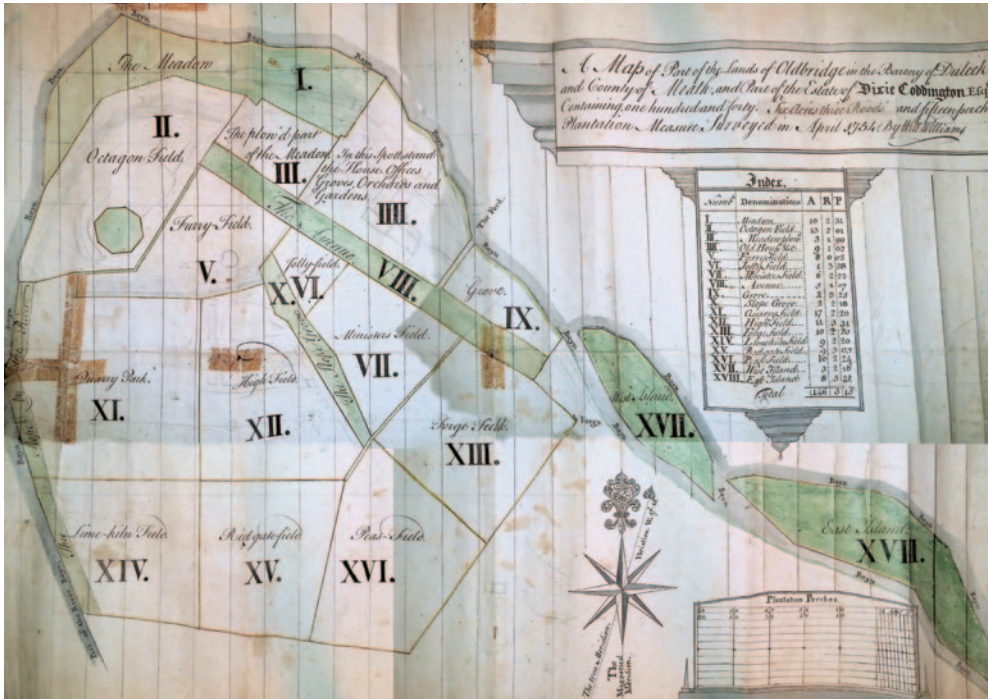
However, while Kelly's inscription would give a construction date of 1750, other sources confirm that the house was built sometime after 1756. Two survey maps of 1754 and 1756 made for Dixie Coddington by a local surveyor, William Williams, show the post-medieval dwelling and its out offices still extant by these dates.<sup>25</sup> Why Coddington commissioned the maps is not known, but it is possible that it was to aid with the development of the new canal which was being cut through his lands at that stage and is indicated on the 1756 map. The surveyor, William Williams, was a writing master and accountant from Drogheda, as well as the surveyor of the Boyne canal from 1755 to 1760.<sup>26</sup> Various engineers and architects, including Thomas Steers, Davis Ducart and Thomas Omer worked on the Boyne Navigation, but none have been connected to the building of Oldbridge.<sup>27</sup>

The 1754 survey shows a demesne of 146 acres, 3 roods and 15 perches, and shows the old house and offices, as well as the sunken octagonal garden, referred to as the ‘Octagon Field’ (Plate 6). Extensive landscape work had clearly been carried out by the time the map was made, and substantiates the idea that much of it had been initiated by John Coddington. The 1756 survey concentrates on the Octagon Field, and illustrates the new ‘Navigation Canal’ (Plate 7).<sup>28</sup> An avenue cuts through the area where the present house would later be built. What is obvious from both surveys was John Coddington’s attempt to create a landscape with striking geometric features, typical of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Indeed, the long straight avenue, a particularly popular feature of the time, dominates the demesne.<sup>29</sup> The earlier post-medieval house is described on the map as adjacent to ‘Offices, Groves, Orchards and Gardens’. The gardens

5 – Jan Wyck (1645-1702), *THE BATTLE OF THE BOYNE*

1693, oil on canvas, 223 x 386.5 cm (National Gallery of Ireland; on loan to Malahide Castle)





6 – 1754 map of Oldbridge (inscribed: ‘A Map of part of the lands of Oldbridge in the barony of Duleek and County of Meath, and part of the estate of Dixie Coddington, Esq., containing one hundred and forty-six acres, three roods and fifteen perched plantation measure, surveyed in April 1754, by Will. Williams’)

7 – 1756 map of Oldbridge (inscribed: ‘A Map of part of the demesne of Oldbridge in County of Meath, the estate of Dixie Coddington, Esq., laid down by scale of 800 feet to a foot, surveyed March the 25th 1756, by Will. Williams’)

(both illus: Coddington collection; these illus are composite images)



8 – Joseph Tudor (1695-1759), *THE OBELISK ON THE BOYNE*

*c.1736, oil on canvas, 104 x 128 cm*

*(reproduction by kind permission of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission; on loan to Hillsborough Castle)*

consisted of square or rectangular beds of plants and vegetables, with flowering varieties interspersed for ornamentation. In addition, orchards and green houses or glasshouses were maintained on the grounds.<sup>30</sup> Gardens close to the main house were often more manicured, while those further away were comparatively less artificial in appearance, though still contrived.<sup>31</sup> Another feature mentioned in the 1740 advertisement, but not obvious from the map is the presence of statuary in the gardens, and this must have added significantly to the aesthetic. The trend of classical statuary in gardens grew increasingly popular in the eighteenth century, particularly with the arrival of the London sculptor John Van Nost III in Dublin in about 1749-50.<sup>32</sup>

Two mid-eighteenth-century paintings show part of the Oldbridge landscape – one by Joseph Tudor painted in 1746 depicting the obelisk on the Boyne (Plates 1, 8), the other by Thomas Mitchell on the same theme, produced in 1757 (Plate 9). Tudor's view depicts a highly idealised picturesque landscape, complete with pastoral figures and animals grazing by the Boyne, with fictitious Italianate architecture representing the village of Oldbridge.<sup>33</sup> This village is not present on the survey maps, and it seems likely that Tudor was harking back to earlier depictions of the landscape around the time of the battle.<sup>34</sup> As such, the painting cannot be read as a depiction of the landscape when Tudor





9 – Thomas Mitchell (1735-1790), *A view of the River Boyne with gentlemen and horses by a statue to William III in the foreground, the Boyne Obelisk beyond* 1757, oil on canvas, 107 x 175.5 cm (© National Museums NI / Ulster Museum Collection)

completed it in 1746, but rather as a glorifying and idealising monument to the site of the Battle of the Boyne.<sup>35</sup> There is also a difficulty in using Thomas Mitchell's later *Boyne Obelisk* to garner an authentic understanding of the landscape at that time. While it shows some of the Oldbridge demesne, Mitchell also depicts Grinling Gibbons' equestrian statue of William III, which he has transposed from its location on College Green in Dublin into a reimagined Boyne landscape. Likewise, the outcrop used as a viewing point by the painting's figures did not exist, and was utilised by Mitchell to create a more engaging composition.<sup>36</sup>

The Irish stonemason and master builder, George Darley, has been suggested as a possible architect for the house.<sup>37</sup> This is based on stylistic grounds, and the knowledge that he was active in the area in the 1760s and '70s, working at Dowth Hall (Plate 11) and Dunboyne Castle.<sup>38</sup> However, the argument for similarity in style to other known works by Darley lacks conviction when we take into consideration the original design of the house. An 1830s manuscript, 'Specification of works at Oldbridge', outlines work undertaken for its then owner, Nicholas Coddington, and indicates that the original house was a three-bay, three-storey-over-basement stone edifice with two-bay, two-storey side wings. The manuscript lists works undertaken by Frederick Darley in 1832-36 that certainly suggest the addition of floors to existing side wings. Under the category for 'cut-stone works' he lists:

The attic over the large cornice of the main house, the cornice on the flanks of D., the cornices and blocking courses on the wings, the ashlar of the said wings down to the heads of the windows, the transom heads of the said windows, also

the head of the windows of the principal story (rere elevation), the string course over them, the chimney shafts down to the level of the wall plate, and the chimney pieces.<sup>39</sup>

This alteration to the wings was corroborated in 2006 by the discovery of a masonry break and rubble stone masonry to the gable walls at second-floor level by the Office of Public Works during restoration works.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, in the background detail of an engraving entitled ‘Obelisk in memory of the Battle of the Boyne, 1 July 1778’, a depiction of what is most probably Oldbridge House as it was in the eighteenth century is presented Plates 10, 12). The engraving was published in Paul Sandby’s *The Virtuosi’s Museum; containing select views in England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1778). It was based on a drawing by the Hon John Dawson, later Viscount Carlow and Earl of Portarlington, who undertook a sketching tour of Ireland in 1774.<sup>41</sup> The image is thought by some to show the old Townley Hall, but given its position across the river from the obelisk, and what we now know about the later additions by Frederick Darley, it seems likely that it is Oldbridge.<sup>42</sup> Further evidence of Oldbridge’s original design is provided by a surviving Coddington descendent who recalled a line-drawing of the house made prior to the renovations in 1835, which was once in the family’s possession. While its location is not currently known, a tracing was made of it before it was mislaid (Plate 13).<sup>43</sup>

Darley would have been in his twenties if he received the commission to design

*10 – OBELISK IN MEMORY OF THE BATTLE OF THE BOYNE, 1 JULY 1778*

*from Paul Sandby, THE VIRTUOSI’S MUSEUM: CONTAINING SELECT VIEWS, IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND IRELAND (1778), plate 18  
(© Royal Academy of Arts, London)*





11 – Dowth Hall, Co Meath  
(courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)

12 – Detail of Oldbridge House  
from *OBELISK IN MEMORY OF THE  
BATTLE OF THE BOYNE*  
from Paul Sandby, *THE VIRTUOSI'S  
MUSEUM*  
(© Royal Academy of Arts, London)

13 – Frontispiece to *THE  
CODDINGTON CORRESPONDENCE:  
SELECTED EXAMPLES OF ONE  
FAMILY'S POSTAL HISTORY FROM  
1788 TO 1916,*  
by Nicholas Coddington  
(Coddington collection)

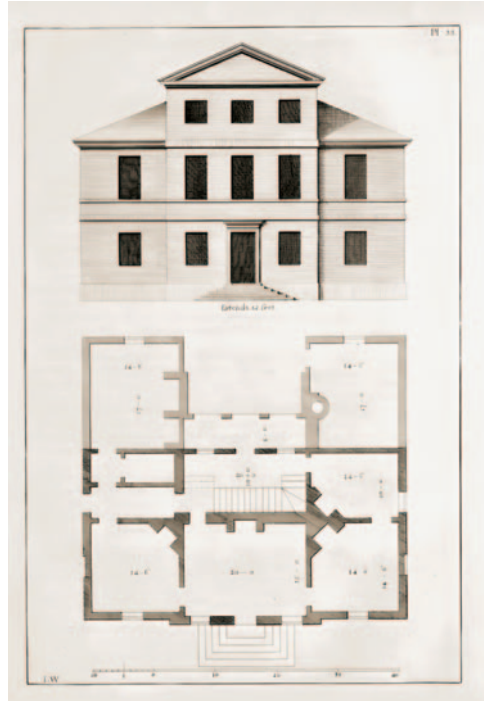


opposite

14 – Isaac Ware, 'Design of  
Building whose plan is near to  
a square where the two back  
rooms and arcade are  
proposed to rise but one story'  
from *A COMPLETE BODY OF  
ARCHITECTURE: ADORNED WITH PLANS  
AND ELEVATIONS FROM ORIGINAL DESIGNS*  
(London, 1756), plate 35



Oldbridge, which makes him an unlikely candidate. He was not active in the area until 1764, when he was at Dunboyne Castle. Moreover, Darley has no other known works that feature a three-bay centrepiece and side-wing elevations. That said, the high-quality stone masonry is not unlike that seen at another building by Darley, the tholsel in Drogheda, built in 1765. Having undertaken a survey of surviving secondary sources recording seventeenth- and eighteenth-century houses in the British Isles, it appears that buildings of the style described are rare in Ireland.<sup>44</sup> An example would be the much grander Lucan House in county Dublin (c.1772). Nor was Oldbridge House dissimilar to the design seen in plate 35 of Isaac Ware's *A Complete Body of Architecture: adorned with plans and elevations from original designs* (London, 1756) (Plate 14), although



the articulated temple front with triangular pediment roof in Ware's design is a more classical arrangement than the design seen at Oldbridge.

George Darley was a member of an extended family of stonecutters and master builders who originated in Newtownards, county Down, and settled in Dublin.<sup>45</sup> Over the eighteenth century, and through half of the nineteenth century, the family were active in many of the large public building projects, such as Trinity College, the parliament building and many churches, as well as country seats and town houses. They had interests in a number of quarries in counties Meath, Wicklow and Down.<sup>46</sup> The Coddington family owned their own limestone quarry at Sheephouse, county Meath, so it is very probable that this was used for the construction of the house.<sup>47</sup> Limestone from Sheephouse was also used in the construction of nearby Townley Hall by Francis Johnston in 1794-1802.<sup>48</sup>

It is possible that another member of the Darley family may have been involved in the design of Oldbridge. In 1748-52, Hugh Darley, an uncle of George, was in Drogheda overseeing the construction of St Peter's Church of Ireland.<sup>49</sup> It seems possible that Hugh used stone from Sheephouse to build the church, and as such may have been aware of the quarry's owners. However, the stone used for St Peter's cannot be definitively substantiated by technical analysis.<sup>50</sup> Darley's original steeple began to fail early on and was replaced by another designed by Francis Johnston in 1785 with stone from Sheephouse.<sup>51</sup>

Dixie Coddington had no surviving heirs, his seven daughters having all died in infancy, and in 1770 he leased Oldbridge to his brother Henry (1734-1816), who ultimately inherited the house on Dixie's death in 1792.<sup>52</sup> Like his brother, Henry was MP for Dunleer (1783-90 and 1797-1800) and appears to have leased both Tankardstown House and Rokeby Hall for periods prior to acquiring Oldbridge. Little is known of how



15 – Oldbridge doorcase with cannon ball embedded in pediment  
(photo by the author)

the house developed under his tenure, and it was not until the early nineteenth century, when Henry's son, Nicholas, inherited the property, that works were again implemented. More extensive renovations were carried out by Nicholas's son, Henry Barry Coddington, soon after his marriage to Maria Sharman Crawford in 1827.<sup>53</sup> In 1830 he commissioned Frederick Darley to add an extra floor on each wing, creating the present continuous roof line.<sup>54</sup> Born in 1798, Darley, a grandnephew of George Darley,<sup>55</sup> was a prolific architect, and is probably best known for his King's Inns Library (1825-28) and Merchant's Hall (c.1821) in Dublin.<sup>56</sup> With the aid of a building contractor named Robert Ballentine, Darley altered the internal layout of the house and put in a new staircase.<sup>57</sup>

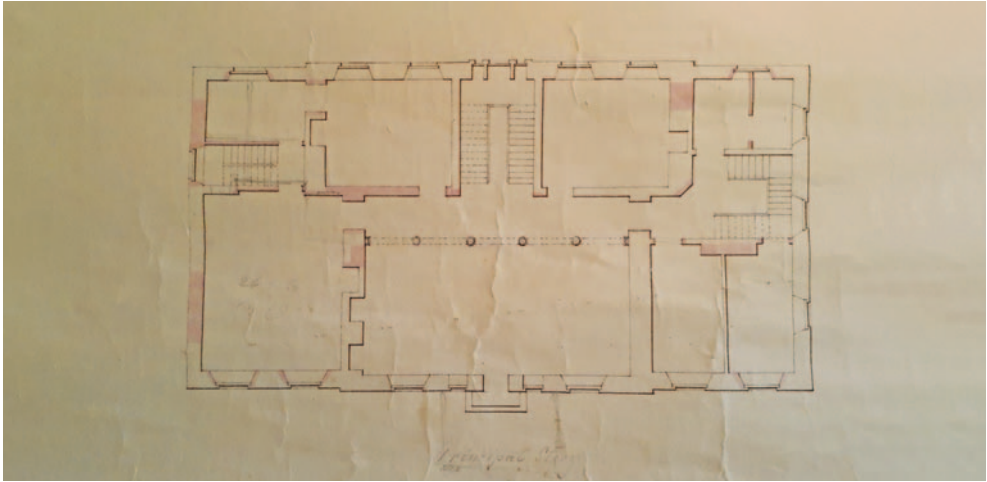
The increased height of the side wings adds to the sheer mass of the present house and harks back to an early modern classical idiom of British Palladianism. Despite a number of ornamental features, the overall impression is of an austere building, defined by the finely droved ashlar across its seven bays.<sup>58</sup> This austerity is somewhat broken by the central tripartite Doric aedicular doorcase, in addition to the three central windows on the *piano nobile* which are capped by triangular pediments on either side and a segmental pediment above the central one. In contrast, the architraves to the rest of the windows are plainly moulded. Pronounced corner quoins on the ground-floor advanced three-bay front and on the corners of the flanking wings give an added air of solidity and gravitas to the entrance level, a feature again more common to Palladian classicism. Particularly noteworthy are the simple mouldings between the demi-mutules on the planceer (or soffit) of the tripartite doorcase cornice. These are now weathered but still clearly represent familiar motifs – possibly bunches of grapes and stylised flowers (Plate 15). While carvings

between mutules are not unusual in classical architecture, such idiosyncratic motifs are rarely seen in Irish houses from the eighteenth century. Similar, but by no means exact examples can be found on the doorcases of town houses in Dublin, at 13 Henrietta Street as well as at 4 and 9 Parnell Square, 21 and 45 Kildare Street, and 42 O'Connell Street. However, these are mostly a variation of the more typical forms of paterae or rosettes.

The rear of the house is made of rubble limestone, covered in a lime render. This was a choice based on practical economy, seen at many large houses. However, the air of refinement is retained by the continued use of V-jointed rusticated quoins at ground level, and flush ashlar quoins at upper levels. The plat band also continues at the rear. In contrast to the front façade, the rear elevation is made up of a five-bay central section, slightly advanced, reflecting the layout of the rooms at the rear of the house. A double continuous stringcourse divides the ground story and *piano nobile*, giving a sense of unity with the main centre body of the house and the flanking wings. This is echoed in the continuous cornice at roof level. However, the roof parapet rises in the centre, giving prominence to the breakfront. Taken together, it can be described as polite yet stern architecture, a statement of gentility associated with the eighteenth-century middling and upper classes of Ireland. When the side wings were raised to align with the roof in the nineteenth century, the house became more substantial, but arguably less animated.<sup>59</sup> Without the varying roof levels, the seven bays of bare masonry can appear as a monotonous rectangular block, broken only by the features mentioned above. However, the quality of stone-masonry shows a virtuoso handling of limestone. Joints between the original eighteenth-century fabric and the nineteenth-century additions are invisible to the naked eye. Clearly, Darley was carrying on his family's rich tradition of high-quality stone masonry. Unfortunately, much of the house's interior has been stripped of original eighteenth- and later nineteenth-century features, except for the parquet flooring and a portion of stuccowork in the saloon (where the Battle of the Boyne exhibition is displayed).<sup>60</sup>

Oldbridge was probably of a double-pile plan, typical of mid eighteenth-century houses, though the nineteenth-century alterations make determining the original layout difficult. Nineteenth-century plans show a skeleton outline of the house on each level, though the interior orientation appears to represent a rejected scheme that Frederick Darley produced at the time of renovation.<sup>61</sup> Parts of the plan are indicated in pink fill, probably highlighting a specific element of remodelling, in this case increasing the height of the house. The ground-floor layout shows a wide, open hall with a narrow columnar screen, most likely a scheme devised and rejected by Darley rather than a copy of the eighteenth-century layout. Why this plan was not chosen is not clear. The intention to insert a large hall and columnar screen leading onto a rear grand staircase, though sacrificing utility for aesthetics, would likely have proved more successful than the ultimate configuration (Plate 16). Darley or Coddington chose instead to move the stair to the left front entrance hall, which visibly interrupts the front windows in a clumsy manner. A second open-well service stair located at the rear of the house would have been used by the family and servants on a day-to-day basis.<sup>62</sup>

While Oldbridge is a country house of middling size, befitting members of the gentry rather than the peerage, Dixie Coddington's choice to locate his new house to overlook the battlefield of the Boyne was a conscious decision to acknowledge not only his

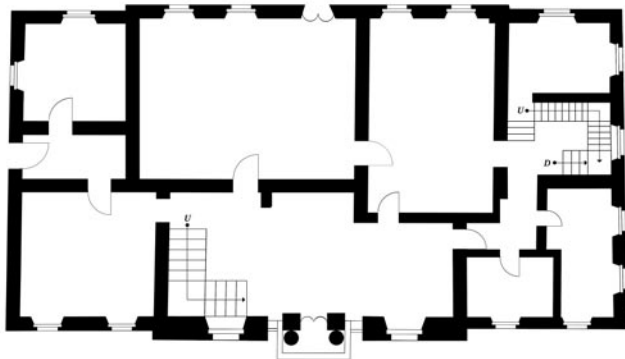


16 – Oldbridge House: ground-floor plan, c.1830  
(Coddington collection)

ancestor's role in that conflict, but also as a statement of his and his family's position within Anglo-Irish society. It can also be read as an attempt by the Coddingtons to legitimise their presence in the wider community. This can be seen in microcosm when the family embedded a recovered cannon ball from the battlefield in the pediment of the entrance doorcase, a feature which remains today. Although the architect of the house cannot be conclusively identified, what is clear is that the house was built in a refined Palladian style at some point after 1756. Its later renovation in the nineteenth century gave it a more austere appearance, but one which still evoked the prestige and pride that the family held for the place.



17 – Representative plan of the present ground floor  
(drawing by Patrick Fleming)



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ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

DIA	Dictionary of Irish Architects, 1720-1940 ( <a href="https://www.dia.ie">https://www.dia.ie</a> )
IA&DS	<i>Irish Architectural &amp; Decorative Studies – The Journal of the Irish Georgian Society</i>
IAA	Irish Architectural Archive
NLI	National Library of Ireland
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

- <sup>1</sup> This decline can be observed through the General Valuation of Ireland records, 1864-c.1975, Valuation Office, Dublin. Rebecca Jeffares, ‘Oldbridge House and demesne, Oldbridge, Co. Meath’, interim report for the Office of Public Works (n.d.) 5.
- <sup>2</sup> Geraldine Stout, *Newgrange and the Bend of the Boyne* (Cork, 2002) 143; Richard Griffith, *General valuation of rateable property in Ireland; County Louth* (Dublin, 1854) 145.
- <sup>3</sup> *Daily Gazetteer*, 20th Jul 1737; Stout, *Newgrange and the Bend of the Boyne*, 145.
- <sup>4</sup> *Evening Press*, 23rd Jan 1982; *Drogheda Independent*, 17th Feb, 25th May and 14th Sept 1984; *Irish Press*, 15th Feb 1985; *Meath Chronicle*, 16th Feb 1985; *Irish Independent*, 3rd Jul 1986.
- <sup>5</sup> IAA, RP.D.99.7, P.B. Gunne Ltd., catalogue for ‘An important auction sale of the entire collection of fine period furniture, porcelain, library and other effects at Old Bridge House, Drogheda, Co. Meath’, 19th-21st Jun, 1984.
- <sup>6</sup> *Irish Times*, 12th Aug 2000.
- <sup>7</sup> Ruth McManus and Gerry O’Reilly, ‘Heritage tourism and the commodification of contested spaces: Ireland and the Battle of the Boyne site’, in Glenn Hooper (ed.), *Heritage and tourism in Britain and Ireland* (London, 2016) 53, 58.
- <sup>8</sup> Dáil Éireann debates, 23rd Sept 2021, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2021-09-23/61/#pq-answers-61> (acc. 11th Jun 2023).
- <sup>9</sup> Charles Croslegh, *Descent and alliances of Croslegh, or Crossle, or Crossley, of Scaitcliffe; and Coddington of Oldbridge; and Evans, of Eyton Hall* (London, 1904) 296-99.
- <sup>10</sup> Registry of Deeds 39-146-24661, 63-99-42827, Coddington to Handcock et al, 14th Nov 1723; Earl of Drogheda et al to Coddington, 9th Mar 1729; Jeffares, ‘Oldbridge House and demesne’, 4; NLI, MS 13024, ‘Conveyance of the lands of Old Bridge, Co. Meath’, 18th Feb 1729.
- <sup>11</sup> Dirk Maes (alias Theodor Maas) had accompanied King William III on his campaign in Ireland. His panoramic sketch is held in the Royal Collections, Windsor (RL 16607), *Panoramic view of The Battle of the Boyne, 1st July 1690 dated 1 Jul 1690*. It is possibly a preparatory sketch for a painting of the same, dated 1690, commissioned by the 1st Earl of Portland, now in a private collection.
- <sup>12</sup> Anne Crookshank and Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin, *Ireland’s painters, 1600-1940* (New Haven and London, 2002) 12.
- <sup>13</sup> Croslegh, *Descent and alliances of Croslegh*, 286.
- <sup>14</sup> DIA, <https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/1809/Dobbs-Arthur> (acc. 3rd Apr 2020).
- <sup>15</sup> D. Helen Rankin and E. Charles Nelson (eds), ‘Curious in everything’: the career of Arthur Dobbs of Carrickfergus, 1689-1765 (Carrickfergus, 1990) 2; Desmond Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs, esquire, 1689-1765: surveyor-general of Ireland, prospector and Governor of North Carolina* (London, 1958) 23.
- <sup>16</sup> *Dublin Journal*, 14th Oct 1740.
- <sup>17</sup> NLI, D.8988-92, pp.18-20, Will of John Coddington, Oldbridge, county Meath, 1737. John Coddington died in Spa, Belgium; see *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, 5th Aug 1740.
- <sup>18</sup> Frances Coddington appears to have leased the house in 1740; *Dublin Journal*, 14th Oct 1740, 15th Aug 1747.
- <sup>19</sup> PRONI, T2519/12/1, fol. 44, Corporation book of the borough of Dunleer.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Edith Mary Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament 1692-1800*, 6 vols (Belfast, 2002) III, 439-40; A.P.W. Malcomson, ‘The Foster family and the parliamentary borough of Dunleer’, *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological & Historical Society*, vol. 17, no. 3,



- 1971, 163.
- 22 PRONI, T2519/12/11, Boyne Canal minute book.
- 23 Christine Casey and Alistair Rowan, *North Leinster: the counties of Longford, Louth, Meath and Westmeath* (London, 1993) 447.
- 24 Inscription on piece of a baseboard of stair (removed during repairs carried out in 1960s) in the possession (2013) of Nicholas Coddington, Toronto, Canada, formerly of Oldbridge House, see entry for ‘Oldbridge House, Co. Meath’, *DIA*, <https://www.dia.ie/works/view/4678/building/co.+meath%2C+oldbridge+house> (acc. 8th Apr 2020).
- 25 Private collection. A later hand indicated the present house’s location using pencil.
- 26 Francis Steer et al (eds), *Dictionary of land surveyors and local map-makers of Great Britain and Ireland 1530-1850, compiled from a variety of sources*, 2 vols (London, 1997) II, 558; Registry of Deeds, 148-159-98974, 70-177-113631, 173-298-116269, 173-298-116270, Nichols to Nugent, 31st May 1751, Nicholls to Bury, 11th July 1754; Eastwood to Markey, 20th Feb 1755, Fairtlough to Higgin, 20th Feb 1756.
- 27 PRONI, T2519/12/11, Account book of the Boyne Canal Commissioners, 1746-1822, ‘Extracts of all Order, Resolutions, Warrants, &c for the Navigation of the River Boyne from the commencement of that work’; Livia Hurley, ‘Public and private improvements in eighteenth-century Ireland: the case of the Conynghams of Slane’ (unpublished PhD thesis, TCD, 2009) 60.
- 28 On the 1754 map it is referred to as the Octagon Field, but in the 1740 letting advertisement it is called an octagonal fruitery; see *Dublin Journal*, 14th Oct 1740.
- 29 Finola O’Kane, *Ireland and the picturesque: design, landscape, painting and tourism, 1700-1849* (New Haven and London, 2013); Vandra Costello, *Irish demesne landscapes, 1660-1740* (Dublin, 2016).
- 30 Costello, *Irish demesne landscapes*, 99.
- 31 Belinda Jupp, ‘Demesne landscapes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ in Rolf Loeber, Hugh Campbell, Livia Hurley, John Montague and Ellen Rowley (eds), *Art and Architecture of Ireland, Volume IV: Architecture 1600-2000* (Dublin, 2015) 362.
- 32 Tony Hand, ‘The Kilkenny marble works: a family business enterprise’ (unpublished PhD thesis, TCD, 2011) 158; Costello, *Irish demesne landscapes*, 54; Nost, John (Van) [2], *DIA*, <https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/5423/nost%2C+john+%28van%29+%5B2%5D%2A> (acc. 11th June 2023).
- 33 The obelisk was completed in 1737, though its dedication appears to have recorded it as 1736; *Daily Gazetteer*, 20th Jul 1737.
- 34 Crookshank and FitzGerald, *Ireland’s painters, 72-73*; ‘Note on a newly discovered landscape by Joseph Tudor’, *Studies: an Irish quarterly review*, vol. 65, no. 259, 1976, 235-38.
- 35 Crookshank and FitzGerald, *Ireland’s painters, 73-74*.
- 36 For a recent in-depth analysis of this painting, see Finola O’Kane, ‘Views of victory: landscapes of the Battle of the Boyne’, in Stephen H. Whiteman (ed.), *Landscape and authority in the early modern world* (Philadelphia, 2023), 190-91.
- 37 Casey and Rowan, *North Leinster*, 447.
- 38 Dowth Hall (n.d., prob. c.1760s) for the Earl of Netterville, thought to be by George Darley, but substantial evidence to corroborate this is lacking. He was responsible in 1767 for Netterville House in Dublin. Dunboyne Castle (c.1764), was remodelled by George Darley for Sarah Hamilton.
- 39 Private collection. ‘Specification of works at Oldbridge,’ signed Frederic Darley, n.d.
- 40 Brady Shipman Martin, ‘Appendix A: Architectural report’, *OPW Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre, Oldbridge House, Oldbridge, Co. Meath* (2006) 6.
- 41 Gábor Gelléri, ‘An unknown “creator” of picturesque Ireland: the Irish sketches and notes of Luttrell Wynne, the “Gentleman of Oxford”’, *IA&DS*, XVIII, 2016, 44-65.
- 42 Michael and Victoria Kavanagh (eds), *Townley Hall: Francis Johnston’s neo-classical masterpiece* (Kinsale, 2022) 27-28.
- 43 A former owner of Oldbridge House has confirmed to the author that one of his ancestors made a line-drawing of Oldbridge prior to the renovations in 1835. While this line-drawing is now missing, a copy was made before it was mislaid for the frontispiece of a private publication by Nicholas Coddington, *The Coddington correspondence: selected examples of one family’s postal history from 1788 to 1916* (n.d.). Reproduced here with permission from the Coddington family.
- 44 The author undertook a desktop survey of records for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century houses. This included, but was not limited to, the photographic collections in the IAA, as well as

- contemporary architectural and pattern books, including Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus* (London, 1715–25); James Gibbs, *A book of architecture containing designs of buildings and ornaments* (London, 1728); Isaac Ware, *A complete body of architecture* (London, 1756). More recent literature consulted included the series of Pevsner Architectural Guides, *Buildings of Ireland* (London, 1979–2020); *IA&DS* (1999–present) and its earlier iteration, *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society* (1958–98); Maurice Craig, *Classic Irish houses of the middle size* (Dublin, 2006); John Summerson, *Georgian London* (London, 1945); James Stevens Curl, *Georgian architecture in the British Isles, 1714–1830* (London, 1993), and more varied new material, too numerous to list here.
- <sup>45</sup> The Darley family were active in Dublin by the late seventeenth century; see ‘Darley Family’, DIA, [https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/1391/DarleyFamily%2A#tab\\_biography](https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/1391/DarleyFamily%2A#tab_biography) (acc. 13th May 2023); Entry for ‘Darley, George [1]\*’, DIA, [https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/1387/DarleyGeorge%5B1%5D%2A#tab\\_biography](https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/1387/DarleyGeorge%5B1%5D%2A#tab_biography) (acc. 13th May 2023); NLI, GO 583, Gillian Darley, untitled [The Darley family] (n.d.).
- <sup>46</sup> Tony Hand, ‘The White Quarry, Ardraccan, Co. Meath’ (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 2003) 12.
- <sup>47</sup> A quarry field is demarcated on William Williams’ survey map of Oldbridge, 1754. Coddington ownership of the lands at Sheephouse during the eighteenth century can be detailed in the Registry of Deeds, 361–515–246173, 449–33–237287, 475–86–299775; Jeffares, ‘Oldbridge House and demesne, Oldbridge, Co. Meath’, 5. Arthur Gibney suggested that the Darley family had an interest in the Sheephouse quarry in his PhD thesis, ‘Studies in eighteenth-century building history’, 12, but no source was cited.
- <sup>48</sup> Frank Michell, ‘The evolution of Townley Hall’, *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, no. 30, 1987, 28.
- <sup>49</sup> Representative Church Body Library (RCBL), ‘Vestry minute book, St Peter’s, Drogheda’, I, 1747–1803, fol. 1, 11–12; NLI, GO 583, Gillian Darley, untitled [The Darley family] (n.d.).
- <sup>40</sup> During the process of the author’s doctoral research in 2019, some stone from both the Sheephouse quarry and St Peter’s Church of Ireland, Drogheda, were brought to the attention of Dr Patrick Wyse Jackson, Associate Professor of Geology and Curator of the Geological Museum at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, who advised that the limestone could not be analysed to the extent that it could pinpoint the stone’s origin quarry or exact location to the extent required to match the two examples.
- <sup>51</sup> RCBL, ‘Vestry minute book, St Peter’s, Drogheda’, I, 1747–1803, fol. 91; Casey and Rowan, *North Leinster*, 237–38; George Wilkinson, *Practical geology and ancient architecture of Ireland* (London, 1845) 307.
- <sup>52</sup> Registry of Deeds, 279–231–181806, Coddington to Coddington, 21st June 1770; Malcomson, ‘The Foster family’, 163.
- <sup>53</sup> John Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic dictionary of the landed gentry of Great Britain and Ireland*, I (London, 1847) 237.
- <sup>54</sup> Private collection, MS, ‘Specification of works at Oldbridge’, signed Frederick Darley, n.d.; Frederick Darley Junior (1798–1872), son of Frederick Darley Senior (1764–1841) worked at Oldbridge from 1832–36.
- <sup>55</sup> George Darley (1730–1817) was the brother of Henry Darley (1721–98), Frederick Darley’s grandfather: NLI, GO 583, Gillian Darley, untitled [The Darley Family] (n.d.).
- <sup>56</sup> Christine Casey, *The buildings of Ireland: Dublin* (London, 2005) 161, 445. For a list of his works, see ‘Darley, Frederick [2], DIA, [https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/1382/Darley%2C+Frederick+%5B2%5D#tab\\_works](https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/1382/Darley%2C+Frederick+%5B2%5D#tab_works) (acc. 3rd June 2023).
- <sup>57</sup> Private collection, ‘A bill for locks and chimney, signed Robert Ballentine’, 17th March 1835, and an inscription by Patrick Kelly on a piece of baseboard of stair (removed during repairs carried out in 1960s); Mark Bence-Jones, *Burke’s guide to country houses* (London, 1978), 228; Casey and Rowan, *North Leinster*, 447; ‘Oldbridge House, Co. Meath’: DIA, <https://www.dia.ie/works/view/4678/building/Co.+Meath%2C+Oldbridge+House> (acc. 8th Apr 2020).
- <sup>58</sup> Drove ashlar is when smooth cut-stones have parallel lines chiselled across the surface for better weathering and to catch the light.
- <sup>59</sup> Brady Shipman Martin, ‘Appendix A, Architectural Report’, 6.
- <sup>60</sup> Hand, ‘The White Quarry’, 12.
- <sup>61</sup> Private collection. Oldbridge House plans of ground floor, middle floor and upper storey, unsigned (n.d.).
- <sup>62</sup> Private collection, ‘Specification of works at Oldbridge’, signed Frederic Darley (n.d.).