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**THE KILKENNY
WOODWORKERS.
6·7·& 8· NASSAU STREET.
DUBLIN.**

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THE IRISH HOMESTEAD ARE MESSRS. KASON AND SON, DUBLIN AND BELFAST.

1 – Advertisement for Kilkenny Woodworkers, 6,7 and 8 Nassau Street, Dublin, from 'A Celtic Christmas', The Irish Homestead supplement, December 1908 (photo: National Library of Ireland)

‘The wild heath has broken out again
in the heather field’:
Philanthropic endeavour
and Arts and Crafts achievement in
early 20th-century Kilkenny

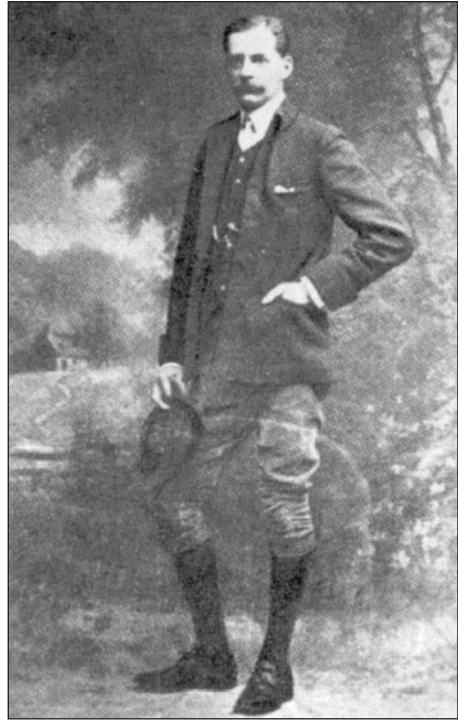
NICOLA GORDON BOWE

IN 1957, HUBERT BUTLER SUGGESTED THE ABOVE QUOTATION FROM EDWARD Martyn’s play *The Heather Field* as a fitting epitaph for ‘the work of scores of poetical social reformers who flourished in Ireland in the first quarter of the century’.¹ Butler particularly cited Standish O’Grady (1846-1928), barrister, romantic nationalist historian, playwright, novelist, journalist and editor of the *Kilkenny Moderator* and the *All-Ireland Review*; Captain the Hon Otway Cuffe (1853-1912), royal courtier, theosophist, Celtic Revivalist, Utopian Socialist, committed Gaelic Leaguer and Mayor of Kilkenny (Plate 2); and Ellen, Countess of Desart (1857-1933), anti-suffragist, philanthropist, Freeman of Kilkenny and member of the first Irish Free State Senate (Plate 3). The extraordinary commitment of these three people, drawn together in an ideological vision of local, national and industrial regeneration, led to a series of exceptional architectural and cultural enterprises in and near the city of Kilkenny. These have been appreciatively documented ever since they were begun, in 1907, but not visually contextualised and synthesised.²

Standish O’Grady was a brilliant, independently minded writer from a well-connected landowning clerical family in west Cork, and an editor with the unionist *Daily Express* newspaper in Dublin. In 1898 he began editing the conservative weekly *Kilkenny Moderator*. He, more than anyone, had ‘discovered’, untangled, reconstructed and made accessible Ireland’s legendary, heroic and narrative history through a series of books he had written over the previous twenty years. His inter-

weaving of the scholarly and the imaginative had ‘drawn back... many an ardent spirit to the romantic age of Ireland’,³ notably the impressionable leaders of the Celtic Revival, whose admired friend and mentor he became. He was described by the poet W.B. Yeats as ‘a man ... to whom ... every Irish imaginative writer owed a portion of his soul’. The visionary writer, artist and agricultural reformer, George ‘AE’ Russell considered that ‘whatever is Irish in me he kindled to life ... It was he who made me conscious and proud of my country.’ The admiration felt for the great Celtic warrior Cuchulain by the increasingly militant educationalist and patriot, Patrick Pearse, was, in his own words, ‘for the Cuchulain whom O’Grady discovered or invented’.⁴

O’Grady shared a clerical Protestant background with the champion of Irish lore and language, Douglas Hyde, and became the first vice-president of Hyde’s newly formed Gaelic League in 1893, but, ironically, he had no grasp of the Irish language. In his writing, O’Grady championed the heroes of the Ulster Red Branch sagas, especially Cuchulain, and the exploits of the ancient Irish militia, the Fianna, under its leader Fionn MacCumhaill (Finn MacCoole). His fascination with Tudor Ireland may have drawn him to Kilkenny, as a city still rich in the history of a proud past, with ancestral Tudor houses intact. He was particularly captivated by sixteenth-century Ireland as a turning



2 – Captain the Hon Otway Cuffe

3 – Lady Desart

(photos: courtesy of Seamus Costello, Michael O’Dwyer and Kieran White, Kilkenny City and County – a photographic record, 1995)



point in Ireland's destiny, which saw the last stand of a great, noble, ancient Gaelic aristocracy. The Irish lords who resisted English domination, Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, and Red Hugh O'Donnell, would become the subjects of dramatic masques he wrote for costumed performance in the city. Unlikely as it may seem, he perceived these Gaelic heroes as models for a contemporary, specifically Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, whom he exhorted, mostly in vain, to resume the historic mantle of enlightened responsibility, obligation and humane leadership which he saw as their hereditary duty. In his writing, O'Grady increasingly attacked what he saw as a 'degenerate, outworn and effete' aristocracy, devoid of vision or heroism.⁵ However, he lauded those committed landowners who stayed or returned to their estates and employed men in time-honoured, feudally run industries.

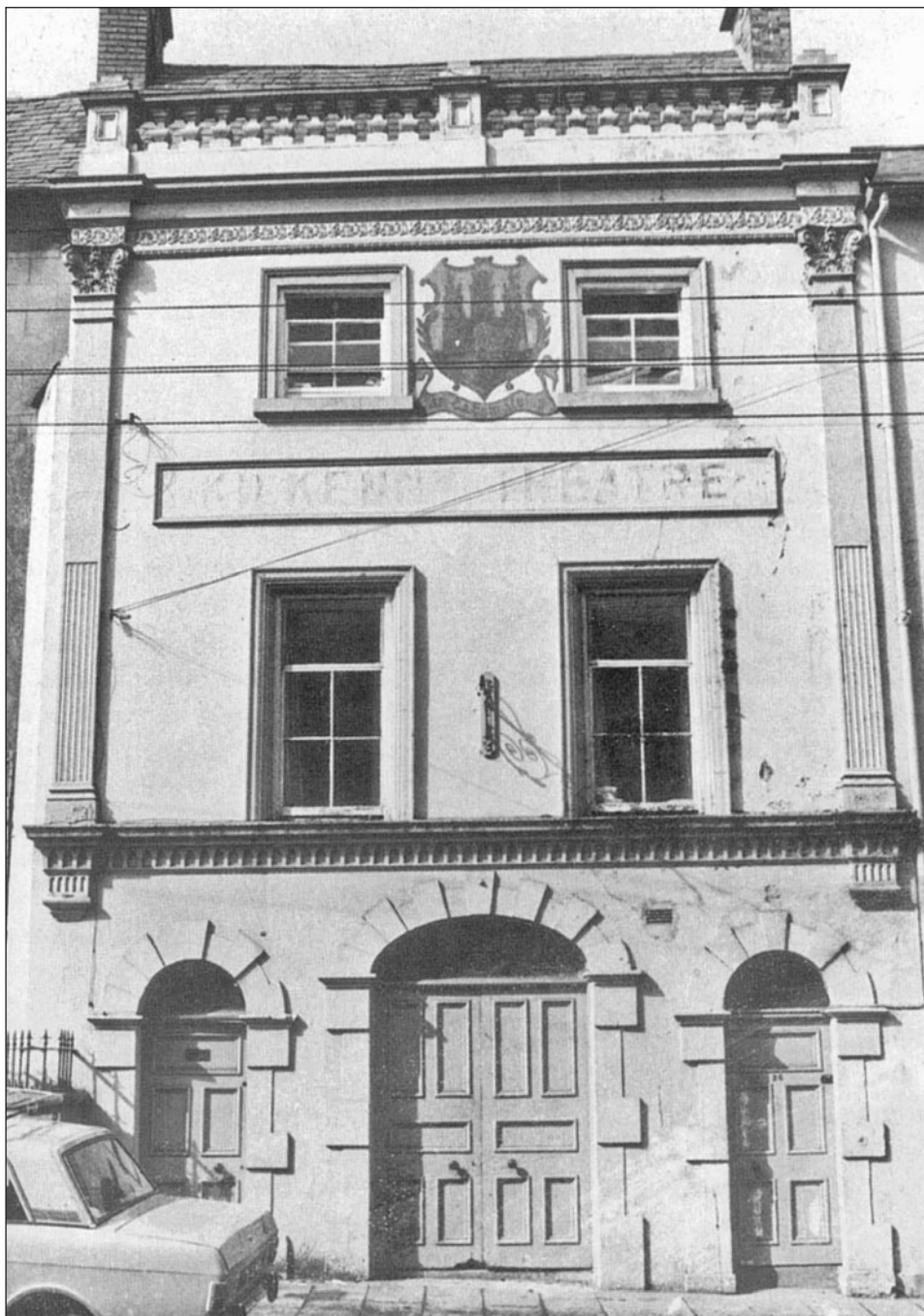
O'Grady's stress on the hereditary duties of Anglo-Irish Protestant leadership and patronage was to influence profoundly the Hon Captain Otway Cuffe, who, after a questing life, went to live permanently in Co Kilkenny after 1898 when his elder brother succeeded as the 5th Earl of Desart. Cuffe would be deeply inspired by O'Grady's insistence on the importance of a spiritual dimension to life, of folklore, of artistic craftsmanship, and of 'the possibility of the revival of the ancient co-operative commune'.⁶ Cuffe and O'Grady became kindred spirits.⁷ For two years O'Grady filled the newspaper with exhortations to revive, on a county basis, 'all the old cultural societies and industrial enterprises which had been killed by the centralizing policy that had followed the Union'. With Cuffe, O'Grady started up a Kilkenny branch of Douglas Hyde's idealistically non-sectarian, non-political Gaelic League (his paper offered a weekly Irish lesson).⁸

Otway Cuffe was aged 46 when he settled with his wife, Elizabeth St Aubyn, into the small estate he found at Sheestown beside the river Nore, just outside Kilkenny city.⁹ Ellen, Lady Desart has written of his conventional London upbringing, education, experience in the army, working (unhappily) in the City of London and in America (on the railways), and successful and distinguished courtly appointments. She records how his love of art led him to travel in Europe, to draw, paint, sculpt, inlay, carve in ivory, cut paper, hammer metalwork and play the mandolin. He also, 'in true Morris fashion',¹⁰ learned to become an expert book-binder, 'as if searching, ever searching for the path along which his spirit might find its fullest expression'.¹¹ After he married in 1891, and settled near Hyde Park, London, he became absorbed in bookbinding, as well as in Indian philosophy, Buddhism and Theosophy. Twenty years earlier, he had become a fervent admirer of William Morris and a socialist of keen conviction after meeting the English poet and designer by chance on a boat returning from Iceland. Morris's conviction after this trip 'that the most grinding poverty is a trifling evil compared with the inequality of classes'¹² seems to have ignited Cuffe's awareness of Morris's insistence on beauty

and interest as a means to lighten ‘the dreariness of the lives of working men’.¹³

Quoting Yeats’ belief that ‘the divulgation of Irish folk-tales among educated people and the association of literature with popular music, speech and dancing might so deepen the political passion of the nation that ... artists and poets, craftsmen and day-labourers would accept a common design’,¹⁴ Cuffe began to pursue in Ireland what his family disparagingly called his ‘activities, his peasant arts and crafts, his collection of folk-lore, his classes in the Irish language ... innocuous ..., but in Ireland inevitably flavoured with political and nationalist controversies’.¹⁵ His commitment was further emphasised by the picturesque ‘national dress’ he devised for himself: ‘wide soft hat, soft collar, full skirted coat of darkest blue, breeches and stockings and low shoes ... a good costume and well suited to his tall robust figure’.¹⁶ The *Irish Independent* later wrote that ‘When he became a Gaelic Leaguer he dressed in Irish costume – in the knee breeches and shoes with which so many Irishmen of the past have dressed. No element of self-consciousness or faddism entered into this action of his, for of all men Captain Cuffe had probably the least liking for the bizarre or the artificial. His object in donning Irish clothes and wearing them publicly was no other than to give a lesson to the people who saw him, of the duty they owed home-made goods.’¹⁷ He was intent on only being an ‘accidental gentleman’,¹⁸ communicating ‘in some other way than in sport alone, hunting or shooting or racing, none of which suited his theosophic creed’,¹⁹ and seeking for men the individual responsibility and happiness of an imagined earlier society.

He established contact with ‘the local people, peasantry, farmers and town-folk’,²⁰ organising hurling and a social club for impressionable youth first at Sheestown. These grew into the Kilkenny Social and Gymnastic Club, which soon needed larger premises. Fund-raising Irish song and dance recitals ensued – which included gymnastics – at which Cuffe would portray the heroic chieftain Eoin Roe O’Neill in verse, and try to draw out young people’s inherent potential through theatrical and physical participation. The result, financially covered by Lady Desart, was that a large terraced house in Kilkenny, 26 Patrick Street, was transformed into a gymnasium and a concert hall, as well as a nine-hundred-seat theatre (Plate 4). This was electrically lit, with dressing rooms and allegorical proscenium decorations (symbolic leafy branches above a rising sun and Gaelic text), painted in situ by Captain Cuffe in emulation of the famed theatre Kilkenny had boasted opposite the Castle between 1798 and 1820.²¹ On 15 August 1902, shortly before the theatre’s opening on 27 October, Cuffe mounted a unique production of *Hugh Roe O’Donnell – A ‘Sixteenth Century Irish Historical Play’*, specially written as a pageant by Standish O’Grady for an open-air performance in the picturesque woods of Sheestown, beneath a half-ruined arch beside the river. True to O’Grady’s ideals, it depicted scenes from the life of the heroic Ulster chieftain, Hugh Roe O’Donnell,



4 – Kilkeny Theatre, Patrick Street, Kilkenny
(photo: Kilkenny City and County – a photographic record)

and was co-acted by youths from the Cave Hill Players – a club run by Cuffe's Belfast philanthropic entrepreneur colleague, Joseph Francis Bigger – and local Kilkenny players. Lit by the bonfires of Bigger's camping company, a harvest moon, coloured fairy lights and Chinese lanterns in the trees, while harpers, pipers and drummers played, the stirring spectacle was open to over two thousand 'gentry, townspeople, farmers, artisans, labourers' alike.²² As Hubert Butler has observed, Cuffe was able to 'stir men's minds in a way they had not been stirred before'.²³

At Sheestown, Cuffe built a model diary, seemingly advised by William Scott,²⁴ the architect he would subsequently employ for his model village, and revived what Lady Desart describes as 'the beautiful old Gaelic Custom of the Samhain'. This symbolic first ploughing of the soil, ritually binding neighbours and Mother Earth, involved garlanded horses and a local band playing fifes and drums beneath a blue banner 'embroidered with the rays of the Rising Sun and Celtic devices'. Such dramatic gestures were continued through his theatrical productions, notably a Nativity miracle play, written in Irish by Douglas Hyde,²⁵ translated by Lady Gregory, with experimental draperies hand-dyed by Cuffe, whose bilingual performances were eventually vetoed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

In 1904, Otway Cuffe was encouraged by the success of two seemingly disparate official visits to Kilkenny, in both of whose civic success he was instrumental: those of King Edward VII and Douglas Hyde. His presidency of the Kilkenny branch of the Gaelic League, from 1904 until his untimely death in 1912, focussed his energies on its nationalist ideals, especially that of encouraging the revival of native industries which had been in decline since the mid-nineteenth century. In the spring of 1904, the prospect of the ruins of a once-thriving woollen mill at Greenvale, on the banks of the Nore, a mile north of the city, led to Cuffe's arranging for Lady Desart's purchase of the twelve-acre site. A company, The Kilkenny Woollen Mills Ltd, was formed that July, with himself as chairman and capital of £15,000 subsequently raised from five hundred shareholders of all incomes when the enterprise was announced six months later. Building work could only begin in October 1905, when an experienced and committed Scot, Mr Hunter, was secured as manager to plan the new mill (Plate 5). Fortuitously, Cuffe was then able to acquire ninety acres of undulating meadow farmland at Talbot's Inch, a townland across the river from Greenvale, to ensure water for the new mill's turbine. He began by allotting three acres there for experimental tobacco cultivation, another once-famous Irish industry which had been revived between 1887 and 1904 by Colonel Nugent Everard of Sir Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organisation Society at Randlestown, Co Meath, and which was currently being encouraged as a profitable small industry.²⁶ Free preparatory expert advice was available from the recently established Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for setting up both

the new curing facilities and the lavishly equipped woollen mills, but English foremen had to be brought over to teach and train the mill workers. Mr Hunter also needed fitting accommodation within close reach of the woollen mills. Although the architect for these projects, Mr Burden, and all the building contractors and workmen were local Kilkenny men, the imported men and their families required adequate, hygienic housing. This led to the construction of a small but architecturally unique model village for which, Lady Desart records, Cuffe ‘supplied the ideas’ which William A. Scott (1871-1921), the most progressive and versatile Celtic Revival architect in Ireland, ‘turned into architectural designs’.²⁷

Scott’s training, first at the Dublin School of Art, then in his father’s architectural practice in Drogheda and in Sir Thomas Newenham Deane’s Dublin office, had resulted in his lifelong interest in ancient Irish architecture, whereas a couple of years with enlightened London architects before he returned to Dublin in 1902 to set up practice enabled him to observe progressive Arts and Crafts housing schemes in England.²⁸ While he was there, two seminal texts on the design of ideal village communities by Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin were published in London: ‘The Art of Designing Small Houses and Cottages’ in *The Art of Building a Home* (1901), and a Fabian tract, *Cottage Plans and Common Sense* (1902). These summed up their views on co-operative housing, advocating plain, symmetrical layouts in plain, boldly gabled parlour cottages. They recommended tradition as the basis for innovation, simple, honest materials, naked brickwork, rational rethinking of interior/exterior space, white-painted bedrooms, sage-green-painted interiors, half landings on staircases, pebble-dashed spandrels, hipped canopies, bold, oversailing gabled roofs or neat, hipped roofs brought down to window height, even such details as dark wood for inglenooks and overmantles, settles and Celtic motifs on ironmongery. The English Arts and Crafts architect, C.F.A. Voysey, was emulated, not least for his regard for materials and for simple harmony in the ‘democratisation of design’. Between 1902 and 1903, Joseph Rowntree commissioned Parker and Unwin to build the first twenty-eight houses of his garden village of New Earswick, near York, for workers at his nearby cocoa refining factory, for rent at 5s a week. The art and architectural press had been extolling the value of village building – prominent chimneys, leaded windows, low-slung eaves, asymmetrical front doors with porches and light-filled interiors (all features of Scott’s designs at Talbot’s Inch) – since at least 1894, illustrating exemplary houses by Baillie Scott, Lutyens and Voysey. Kenny illustrates two houses designed for a Mr John Ryder Hunt by Scott in 1902, shortly after his return to Dublin, at Chipstead, Surrey, in the local vernacular-revival style.²⁸ Their formal, vertical massing and asymmetrical, buttressed entrance porches anticipate Scott’s designs for village houses and Lady Desart’s own house at Talbot’s Inch, albeit less dramatically than his similarly influential Enniskillen

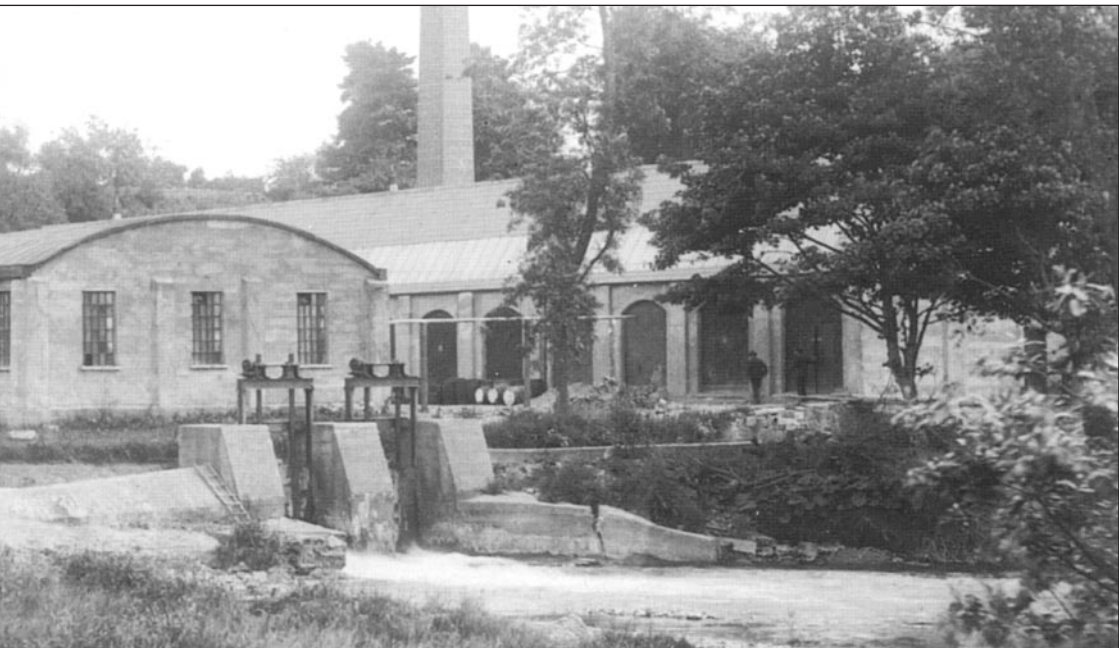
Town Hall of 1898. Scott had also converted a house, Clogherevagh on Lough Gill, Co Sligo, in 1899 for other William Morris aficionados, the newly married Wynnes, and designed a clearly Voysey-influenced house, Killyhevlin, Co Fermanagh (1903).³⁰ Its panelled inglenooks, wide bell-cast eaves with upper windows set close to them, white roughcast and asymmetry are developed in Talbot's Inch.

Cuffe may have been directed to Scott by T.W. Rolleston, a strong and articulate design reformer, close friend of O'Grady, and Honorary Secretary of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland between 1898 and 1908, by the consciously Celtic Revivalist Hon Maud Wynne of Clogherevagh, or her Galway brother Lord Killanin, for whom Scott designed a much-lauded church at Spiddal and would subsequently design a country house, or through Robert Elliott, the Irish art critic with whom Scott visited Ravenna and Constantinople in 1906 and who eulogised Scott's work in his book, *Art in Ireland*, of the same year.³¹ An early exterior perspective design Scott drew in 1906 for the agricultural college at Athenry, Co Galway, commissioned by Sir Horace Plunkett's non-political, co-operatively based Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, is the design which bears the most similarity to the clustering diversity of the twenty-six small village houses Scott designed for Talbot's Inch.³²

5 – Woollen Mills, Greenvale, Kilkenny (photo: Lawrence photographic glass plate collection, NLI)



Built by a local firm, initially for married workers, the rationally planned, two-storey concrete houses were originally thatched and limewashed (Plate 6).³³ A photograph of two of the first ‘Model Cottages for Married Men’, reproduced in a leading Irish society magazine, shows the brick chimney stacks and thatched hip-gabled roofs,³⁴ but not the limestone facing and harling Scott had carefully drawn in a clear design for ‘A Pair of Foremens Cottages, Garden Village, Kilkenny’, which was featured in an *Irish Builder and Engineer* supplement of 30 November 1907 (Plate 7). In the photograph, workers are seen happily enjoying their front gardens, circled by wooden paling fences. Fresh air is welcomed through open, leaded case-ment windows, herringbone and decorative brick patterns adorn the low-eaved façades (Plates 8, 9), and rainwater is collected in a barrel, although the houses were also served by a spring water reservoir (picturesquely concealed by water towers) and an electric generator. A thriving dairy farm was set up over the road, with two farm houses to serve the burgeoning community, and ready access to the woollen mill across the river given by an ‘artistic’ and serviceable suspension bridge specially erected by Captain Cuffe (Plate 10). Mr Hunter, the Mill manager, was given a well-appointed detached house, Cul-na-Greine, also designed by Scott, at the far end of the village opposite the woollen mill. Carpenters, a caretaker, a farm manag-





6 – *Original thatched worker's house at Talbot's Inch, Kilkenny*
(photo: Kilkenny City and County – a photographic record)

7 – *W.A. Scott, design for a pair of cottages, Talbot's Inch, Kilkenny*
(from *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 30 November 1907)



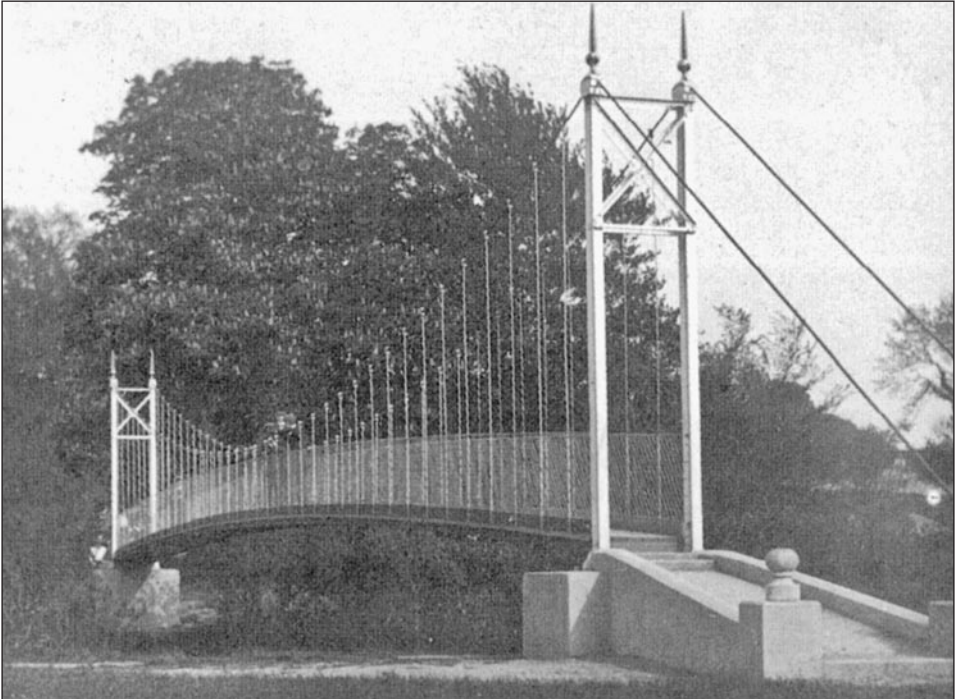


8 – Detail of decorative brickwork on façade of worker's cottage, Talbot's Inch, Kilkenny
(photo: author's collection)



9 – Detail of decorative brickwork on worker's cottage, Talbot's Inch (photo: author's collection)

10 – Suspension bridge from Talbot's Inch to Greenvale Woollen Mills (destroyed 1947)
(photo: Kilkenny City and County – a photographic record)



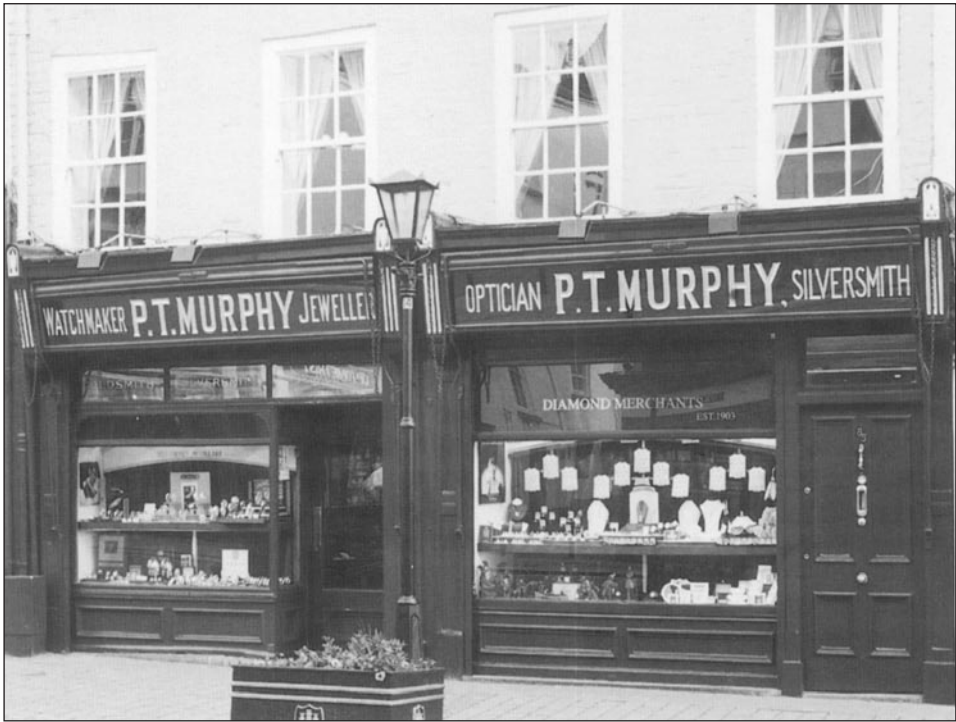
er, painters, gardeners, as well as millworkers, were accommodated around a generous open green, used for sports. Generously but simply serviced, sanitary, adequately lit and ventilated, with sculleries and three or four bedrooms, these cottages with their sunny porches conformed to current progressive ideals on model labourers' cottages, which would be formalised in the 1906 and 1907 Labourers Acts (Ireland) when the Government allocated no less than £4 million for loans to rural authorities for housing operations.³⁵ These were vigorously expressed in a pamphlet by Cuffe's Belfast colleague, Joseph Bigger, 'Labourers' Homes Suitable for Ireland', published by the *Irish Independent* in Dublin in 1907, and in articles discussing details of 'Model Labourers' Cottages', 'The Housing of the Irish Artisan', 'Cottage Gardening' and 'A Plea for Village Halls'.³⁶

While the model village was still being built, Cuffe's manifold efforts resulted in his election as a town councillor, three months before the revived woollen mills were ceremonially opened by the Chief Secretary for Ireland, on 16 April 1906. Before the end of 1905, Otway Cuffe had also taken over the responsibility for a group of inexperienced young men trained in carpentry at Kilkenny's new technical school, who had banded together as a co-operative under the name of the Guild of Woodworkers in the hope of reviving a local industry and of finding outlets for their work.³⁷ He began by organising them into a business enterprise, registering them as a co-operative, and by securing 'a capable foreman from England', Mr Woodroffe, and premises for them in Patrick Street.³⁸ Their work at the 1906 RDS Spring Show included 'a beautiful mahogany cabinet lined with yellow Irish poplin' and 'a chimney piece in carved wood'.³⁹ A year later, in November 1906, Lady Desart financed an extensive city centre premises in Dublin, at 7 and 8 Nassau Street, which was to be run by Mr Earle, an experienced furniture tradesman Cuffe had found in England, as a showcase for the work of the Kilkenny Woodworkers Ltd, as they had been renamed (Plate 1). By then, the workforce had been considerably expanded and relocated in a new factory at Talbot's Inch with the latest and best machinery. This was driven by electricity generated by a suction gas plant, so they could offer high-quality, competitively priced cabinet work, church furniture and office fittings, mostly of Irish timber (oak, walnut, elm, lime, ash or birch). In April 1907, the Government passed the Trade Marks Act as an incentive to home-grown industry, so that the woodworkers could pay 10s 6d a year to enable their ordinary work to be die-stamped and the more expensive items to carry an inlaid bone label inscribed with their registered number, 024, and the new 'Déanta in Eirinn' quality Irish National Trademark (Plate 12). The Christmas 1907 issue of *The Lady of the House* ran a feature on the venture, marvelling at the intricacies and speed of the spindle-moulding, planing, dove-tailing and fretwork machines, the large horizontal and circular saws, turning lathes, the prolific veneering and inlaying

workshops, and polishing, seasoning and carving departments.⁴⁰ They specialised in ‘Sheraton’ designs, ‘dainty little occasional tables of mahogany, inlaid with satin-wood’ and ‘fumigated’ oak revolving bookcases, chairs, tables and hall-stands, while offering accurate copies of antique furniture and Kilkenny-made upholstery.⁴¹ Their carving was popular on shop signs, such as those for P.T. Murphy, Watchmaker, Jeweller, Optician and Silversmith (Plate 11),⁴² for the China Hall of M.F. Murphy, Glass and China Merchant (Plate 13),⁴³ and Duggans’ Monster House drapery and haberdashery store,⁴⁴ all in High Street, Kilkenny. The woodworkers’ mostly conventional 1912 catalogue includes spirited Celtic zoomorphic wood carving boldly incorporated into the front panels of an Irish walnut hall presentation cabinet (Plate 14).⁴⁵

Lord Mayo had been trying to encourage the informed revival of cabinet-making in Ireland since he founded the Arts and Crafts Society in 1894, while skilled carvers like Alice Shaw and Sophia St John Whitty in Dublin taught and exhibited their own work and that of their classes. Kilkenny had been establishing a reputation among Ireland’s woodcarving classes over the previous fifteen years,⁴⁶ notably by Edward Holohan (1850-1896), an estate carpenter on the Butlers’ Kilmurray estate at Thomastown, who carved locally in a heavily Irish Baroque revival manner. Throughout the 1890s, a thriving class was run by two ladies from the rectory and then from the schoolhouse at Thomastown, offering such items as bellows, trays, stools, tables, breadboards, blotters and boxes. In 1893, two more ladies began classes specialising in chip carving at St John’s Vicarage, Kilkenny. In 1894 a further class was set up by Canon Beresford in the rectory at Inistioge, and another, in the following year, at Kilmurray. In 1896, Constance Power, wife of the Rev George Beresford Power of Kilfane Glebe near Thomastown, began a further local class. By 1898 she was exhibiting designs for panels at the Royal Dublin Society, along with one of the few professional woodcarvers noted, William Emery (c.1879-1966) from Drumcondra, who would subsequently become the most skilled carver after the Kilkenny Woodworkers had moved to Talbot’s Inch.⁴⁷ Constance Power’s pupils had graduated to full-scale furniture by 1901 (a walnut cabinet and oak book stand), while she designed picture frames; one that has survived from her classes shows a finely articulated dragon. The 1905 Royal Dublin Society’s Art Industries Exhibition saw entries from Emery, exhibiting his own work professionally as well as that of his Broomhill woodcarving class at Drumcondra, and from Constance Power, a prolific teacher if not a professional carver, whose class showed the sort of collaborative carving on a hall seat that Lady Desart would commission Emery and the Kilkenny Woodworkers to make for the waiting room entrance to her model hospital ten years later.⁴⁸

The widespread responsibilities assumed by Otway Cuffe led to his popular

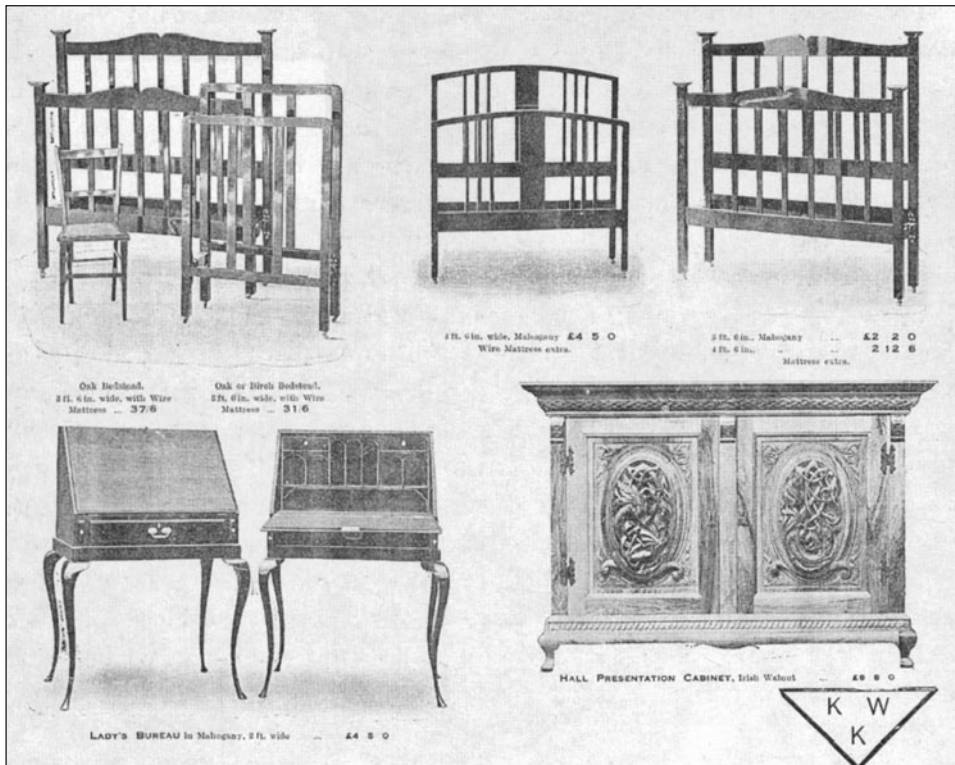


11 – Shopfront (right-hand side) by Kilkenny Woodworkers for P.T. Murphy, High Street, Kilkenny (photo: courtesy Seamus Costello)

12 – Inlaid bone label of Kilkenny Woodworkers, bearing their registered number, 024, and the new ‘Déanta in Eirinn’ quality Irish National Trademark, which was set into all their more expensive furniture – in this case, a lady’s mahogany writing cabinet (photo: author’s collection)

13 – Detail of carved wood shopfront for Michael Murphy’s China Hall, High Street, Kilkenny (collection: National Museum of Ireland)





14 – Page from Kilkenny Woodworkers 1912 sales catalogue,
showing typical range of furniture available (collection: Kilkenny Archaeological Society)

election as Mayor of a still largely apathetic, dilapidated and impoverished Kilkenny in January 1907, 220 years after the office had been held by his ancestor, Captain Agmondisham Cuffe.⁴⁹ His commitment to the ideals of the Gaelic League guided all his (and Lady Desart's) democratising undertakings in Ireland: to 'call into being a harmonious spirit in Ireland, and to revive her ancient genius by rescuing her native language ... from ... imminent danger of extinction ... by promoting the study of that language and that of ... Celtic music in song, fiddle and dance'.⁵⁰ He saw the encouragement of industry in craft and art as a gateway to peace and prosperity, and as fundamental to the future well-being of a long demoralised people, for whom self-reliance offered the only way forward in their newly awakened land.⁵¹ With a network of agents at home and abroad, and the hope of a contract from the Irish Constabulary, Cuffe and his committed Mill manager envisaged a 'system of profit-sharing as an incentive to carefulness and thrift' with provision for employees' carefree old age. For its first few years, the 'sylvan surroundings', breezy fresh air, arcadian accommodation and welcome employment enticed male

and female workers at the streamlined woollen mills,⁵² as they turned out ‘Woollens, Worsteds and Lady Cloths’⁵³ for tweeds, serges, shawls, rugs, blankets, coloured flannels and, later, uniforms on twenty up-to-the-minute box Jacquard looms driven by a capacious turbine (‘the only one of its kind in the British Isles’) powered by the nearby river. Emulating progressive model systems in England, America, Germany and Austro-Hungary, as much as a Morrisian desire ‘to make the lives of the workers better and brighter and happier and to give them a pride in the work’, this enlightened enterprise received early encouragement from Douglas Hyde, Standish O’Grady, Stephen Gwynn, Sir Horace Plunkett, Maud Gonne MacBride and T.W. Rolleston, among others. In celebration, O’Grady specially wrote another open-air theatrical masque, *Scenes from the Legends of Finn*, which was performed on 5 July 1907 beside the newly refurbished mills at Greenvale. Directed by Cuffe and mounted by his Gaelic League colleagues, it featured Cuffe, Rolleston, George Coffey (Keeper of Antiquities at the National Museum of Ireland) as Elizabethan Gaelic chieftains (Plate 15).⁵⁴ Proceeds went to the Gaelic League.

On 30 November that year, *The Irish Builder* reproduced W.A. Scott’s design for a ‘Manager’s House, Garden Village, Kilkenny’, a fine half-hipped thatched building of concrete, faced in roughcast and local stone, with battered walls, tall chimney stacks, a distinctive array of casement windows lurking under sweeping

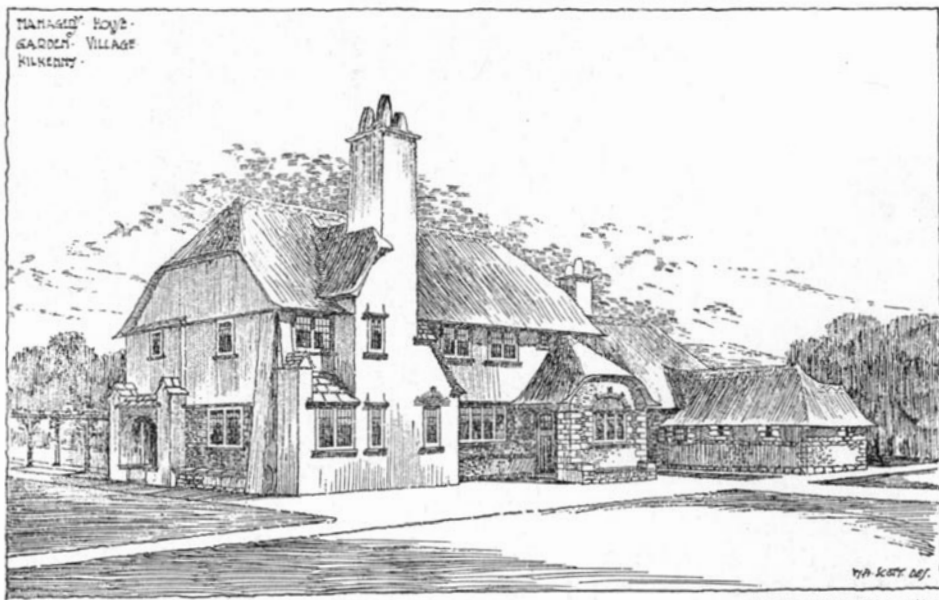
15 – Contemporary photograph of players in Standish O’Grady’s open-air theatrical masque, *Scenes from the Legends of Finn*, performed at Greenvale in July 1907 (photo: author’s collection)



eaves, and two distinctively rough-hewn asymmetrical porched entrances (Plate 16). With its half-timbered garden front and garages, stables, outhouses, greenhouses, chauffeur's, maids', butler's and gardeners' quarters, pergola, and raised dais for meetings set in gardens, this light-filled, wood-panelled 'picturesque bijou residence' set in rolling pasture land, became Lady Desart's beloved home, 'Aut Even' (i.e. 'Pleasant Place' from the Irish 'Ait Aoibhinn') at Talbot's Inch (Plate 17).⁵⁵ At her gates stood another subtly articulated Scott design, 'Tigh na Cairde', the ample and well-furnished house built within sight of the woodwork factory for its manager, Mr William Faulds (Plate 18). An article of December 1910 reports that Lady Desart's 'own house was, with the exception of a grandfather's clock, completely furnished by the Kilkenny Woodworkers, and her artistic rooms are a capital advertisement for the adjacent manufactory'.⁵⁶ Of particular interior interest in her house is the still extant small-scale, neat zoomorphic interlaced carving around her mahogany dining-room fireplace – purportedly by William Emery (cover illus) – as well as the strongly coloured, streaky stained glass panels leaded into casement windows (cover illus), with hand-forged spiral catches and rectangular brass finger-plates on the heavier doors, reminiscent in their simplicity of the geometric designs of her fellow Austrian, Otto Wagner.

By 1910, although there were then twenty-two cottages built at Talbot's Inch,

16 – W.A. Scott, design for manager's house, Talbot's Inch, Kilkenny
(from *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 30 November 1907)





17 – W.A. Scott, *Aut Even*: garden front entrance of Lady Desart's house, Talbot's Inch, Kilkenny
(photo: author's collection)

18 – W.A. Scott, *Tigh na Cairde*: house built for Kilkenny Woodworkers factory manager, William Faulds, at Talbot's Inch, Kilkenny



the capital of the woollen mills had already been reduced and limited at least once. However much they appeared to be thriving, and continued to do so for another seventeen years, they continued to encounter management problems and did not fulfil the ambitious financial expectations hoped for by their shareholders. Lady Desart, its continuing benefactor, had become a considerable focus of attention early in November of that year, when a decade of outstanding civic munificence led to the Honorary Freedom of the City of Kilkenny being conferred on her – the first woman and the first Jew to receive that honour. Two days earlier, she formally opened a new Carnegie Public Library on the John's Quay site she had purchased for the people of Kilkenny; she also paid for all its furnishings, many of which were by the Kilkenny Woodworkers.⁵⁷ The library's early use of concrete was also to be found in Alexander Burden's St John's Bridge, dating from the same year, the longest single-span ferro-concrete bridge in the British Isles,⁵⁸ which bears a dedication to Otway Cuffe, the city's current mayor.

However, the enormous effort and responsibilities of Cuffe's manifold enterprises had put his health under considerable strain, not helped by industrial upheavals at both the woollen mills and the woodworkers, mainly exacerbated by the employment of skilled immigrant workers from Britain. In 1911, he was accompanied by a friend first to Europe, for a recuperative break, and then on a ship bound for Australia. Tragically, he caught pneumonia on board and died ashore, at Freemantle, on 2 January 1912.

For weeks afterwards, the *Kilkenny Moderator* bears witness to the deep shock, sense of loss and distress felt by the many people Cuffe had encouraged, befriended, supported and given employment to, as well as to the many local, genuinely sincere tributes, formal and otherwise. The heartfelt letters they published in response, from his stricken widow and sister-in-law, offered a source of comfort and future hope. Although Mrs Cuffe eventually left Sheestown for Kerry, Lady Desart took on Otway Cuffe's Kilkenny mantle as much as she could; she was determined to make 'a noble and lasting success of the work he ha[d] sacrificed his life in starting ... as undying proof for all the world to see that he ha[d] not tried in vain'.⁵⁹ One of two intelligent, well-educated daughters of an enormously wealthy Austrian Jewish philanthropic banker father, Henry Louis Bischoffsheim, and beautiful, brilliant society hostess mother, Clarissa (née Biedermann) who had settled in London in 1816, her family moved in the most distinguished and elevated circles. On both parents' sides was a background of ingenious enterprise, charitable activity and enlightened, progressive patronage during a period of considerable anti-Semitism: her maternal grandfather had become the Court Jeweller in Vienna and one particularly exceptional uncle, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, was a brilliant Jewish industrialist, financier, financial advisor to kings and princes. Hirsch's pioneering Turkish

railway empire made him the world's leading captain of industry and finance, but he also believed passionately in visionary education, which alone could encourage that love of work and the land which might result in free, self-supporting and useful human beings. Lady Desart cannot have been unaware of the support and encouragement being offered to unpatriated Jews in a range of craft industries at the turn of the century, mainly through the auspices of wealthy Jewish sponsors in Austria; in particular, her uncle's Hirsch schools – of which there were more than fifty by 1900 – emphasised woodwork instruction, manual skills and trade apprenticeship.⁶⁰ Thus, through the inspiration of her brother-in-law, Otway Cuffe, she seemed determined to synthesise his aspirations and those of herself and her family for her own race with those of her adopted country.

She took an active interest in the woollen mills, helping to realistically realign its capital on more practical lines, which resulted in a trading profit of £1500 in September 1913.⁶¹ That March, she legally terminated the tobacco-growing venture at Talbot's Inch. Her active involvement and belief in the Gaelic League continued, not least for its commitment to the resurrection of the Irish language as a national cultural bond which she saw as analogous to the way in which the Hebrew language could draw the Jews of all nations and backgrounds together, particularly in their prayers and religious services. As early as June 1904, she had attended a Gaelic League *feis*, where Douglas Hyde had noted her delight at its non-political optimism.⁶² In 1915, members of the Kilkenny Gaelic League presented a bound volume on Kilkenny to their president, which bears her bookplate drawn by Jack B. Yeats and printed at the Cuala Press (Plate 19). Although it is inscribed in Irish, Lady Desart's command of the language was reportedly negligible.⁶³ Her commitment to a romantic nationalist ideal lay behind her somewhat surprising, passionately anti-suffragist stance. In May 1913, while most enlightened women of her class and education who were engaged in some form of Gaelic League activity in Ireland were fighting for the vote, she presided at the AGM of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage at Molesworth Hall, Dublin. She won the approval of the *Kilkenny Moderator* when she idealistically opined:

Let us bring back to an apathetic world the old ideal that woman was the spirit of peace, of love, of all that makes for the pure and beautiful sides of life. If we do not succeed in doing so, social life must go back to the rude roughness of the so-called 'Dark Ages'.⁶⁴

Her main involvement was with Talbot's Inch, which she continued to improve by commissioning the Dublin architect, Albert Murray (1849-1924) to design a cottage hospital, which she could visit daily via a footpath from her garden. Named, like her house, 'Aut Even', it was built on a fashionable Arts and Crafts 'butterfly' plan,



19 – Jack B. Yeats, design for bookplate for Ellen Odette, Lady Desart, printed by Cuala Press, Dublin
(private collection)

20 – The Kilkenny Hunt at Aut Even Hospital, Talbot's Inch, showing Murray's original hospital building
(photo: Kilkenny City and County – a photographic record)



with separate wings for men and women patients (Plate 20), and was furnished by the Kilkenny Woodworkers. Their decoration of the small central waiting hall is particularly noteworthy for William Emery's lively interlaced carving of a large, smoothly polished pine settle, while a nearby hallstand in the otherwise extensively remodelled building represents the woodworkers' more run-of-the-mill productions. Over the settle she erected a marble plaque to the 'grateful and loving memory of her brother-in-law, Captain the Hon Otway Cuffe with whom the idea of a Hospital at Talbot's Inch first originated'. This is adorned with Celtic Revival interlace and the rising sun symbol of the Fianna, which had flanked each side of his beloved theatre. She also built a house between the hospital and the village for Dr Charles Drennan, the doctor and medical director of the hospital, whose impressive facilities included an up-to-the-minute operating theatre and X-Ray room. The hospital was opened in 1915, the year she also erected a two-storey concrete recreation hall in the village, whose functional but imposing restraint recalls the industrial architecture of the German, Peter Behrens. Kenny records that it contained a coal house, billiard room, tea room, dance hall, committee room and facilities.⁶⁵ It had been matched a year earlier by the more picturesque but equally functional Desart Hall in New Street, Kilkenny, built on a site Lady Desart owned at the back of the theatre Otway Cuffe had so often used for Gaelic League activities that it became known as the Gaelic Theatre. The Dutch-gabled front and two side façades of Desart Hall, adorned with stuccoed sunrise symbols of the ancient Irish Fianna, and flanked by tall lanterned gate piers, belie its extensive, rationally planned interior of ballroom, stage, dining room and full facilities for social functions.

Also in 1914, the Dublin shop of the Kilkenny Woodworkers was transferred from 6, 7 and 8 Nassau Street to 66 Grafton Street. The factory seems to have employed as many as sixty workers – even more – and have produced a wide range of well-made, fairly priced work. A fine pair of decoratively slatted mahogany bookcases (Plate 21) exhibited by them at the Women's National Health Association's 'Ui Breasail' Industrial Exhibition at the Royal Dublin Society in June 1911 were acquired by the Society for their Leinster House reading room, where they can be seen in a contemporary photograph (Plate 22).⁶⁶ McAdams and Butler both record that the workshop had been plagued by strikes, fraud, social jealousy and union friction between management and staff. In 1920, it was virtually closed down. Seven years later, fire completely destroyed its premises, but by then the factory was only being used for rough timber work. The woollen mills finally closed down in 1929, after their share of strikes and disturbances, although they survived as a hosiery factory under a subsequent owner. By then Lady Desart had provided Talbot's Inch with a small village school and the only covered-in handball alley in the country.



21 – Mahogany bookcase by the Kilkenny Woodworkers, c.1910 (168 x 173 x 77.5 cm), originally purchased by the Royal Dublin Society, now in the National Museum of Ireland collection

22 – A pair of Kilkenny Woodworkers' mahogany bookcases in the Royal Dublin Society Reading Room, Leinster House, Dublin (photographs: National Museum of Ireland)



In recognition of her services to the economic and cultural welfare of Ireland, President Cosgrave had appointed her a senator of the new Irish Free State Government, in December 1922, which meant she divided her last years between Dublin and Talbot's Inch, speaking out against chauvinistic nationalism and the negation of personal liberty. On her death in June 1933, aged 75, her Talbot's Inch estate was sold, Desart Court, ancestral seat of the Cuffes at Cuffesgrange, having been destroyed in 1923 during the Civil War.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ In an essay, 'The Auction', from a drafted autobiography, published in Hubert Butler, *Grandmother and Wolfe Tone* (Dublin 1990) 25-6. Butler sees the hero of Edward Martyn's book, which provides the title for this account, as symbolising the incompatibility between poetry and practical life. Butler's copy of Martyn's book was acquired for him by his mother at the auction of Otway Cuffe's (q.v.) library at Sheestown, Co Kilkenny.
- ² A full bibliography listing all the published and unpublished documentary sources of Kilkenny's Arts and Crafts movement, centred around Captain Cuffe and Lady Desart, has yet to be compiled. Apart from Lady Desart's own unpublished 'Memoirs' (a copy of which is held in the Kilkenny Archaeological Society Library, Rothe House, Kilkenny, later referred to as: Lady Desart, 'Memoirs') and references in books by Rothery, Williams, Larmour, Bowe and Grimes (cited below), the fullest recently published accounts are Hubert Butler's essays, 'Otway Cuffe' (1948), reprinted in *Grandmother and Wolfe Tone* (Dublin 1990) and 'Anglo-Irish Twilight' (1978/9), reprinted in *Escape from the Anthill* (Mullingar 1986); J.L. McAdams' booklet, *Ellen, Countess of Desart and Captain The Hon. Otway Cuffe*, based on a paper read to the Kilkenny Archaeological Society on 27 November 1958; Claire Kenny's

- booklet, *Talbots Inch: The Origins [sic] of Kilkenny's Model Village* (1989) based on her 1988 undergraduate diploma thesis, Claire Kenny, *Talbots Inch Kilkenny c.1904: An Arts and Crafts Model Village* (diploma thesis, College of Marketing and Design, Dublin, 1988). *Kilkenny City and County – A Photographic Record* (Kilkenny 1995), compiled by Seamus Costello, Michael O'Dwyer and Kieran White, includes a section on Lady Desart.
- ³ Editorial in the Celtic Christmas issue of the *Irish Homestead*, December 1900. For a bibliography of O'Grady's books, see P.S. O'Hegarty, *A Bibliography of Books written by Standish O'Grady* (Dublin 1930).
 - ⁴ See Nicola Gordon Bowe and Elizabeth Cumming, *The Arts and Crafts Movements in Dublin and Edinburgh 1885-1925* (Dublin 1998).
 - ⁵ An embittered dispute ensued through his editorial pages, leading to his sorry banishment from the *Kilkenny Moderator*. His subsequent broadsheet, the *All-Ireland Review* became, between 1900 and 1906, the vessel for his attempts to prepare Ireland for the new century.
 - ⁶ O'Grady's schemes for small-scale industrial colonies on enlightened aristocratic estates first appeared in his *Toryism and the Tory Democracy* (1886); these were followed by broader Guild socialist plans, mapped out in periodicals such as the *Irish Nation and Peasant* and in *The Irish Homestead* (e.g. in his leader 'The First Irish Commune of the New Order', 5 February 1910, 109).
 - ⁷ Most writers maintain that O'Grady encouraged Cuffe to return home as one of the few Anglo-Irish aristocrats who had the sensitivity, experience and aptitude to fulfil his vision for the future leadership of Ireland, while Hubert Butler contends that it was Otway Cuffe who brought O'Grady to Kilkenny, urging him to take over the local newspaper.
 - ⁸ Lady Desart wrote in her 'Memoirs': 'the first and unalterable rule of the Gaelic League was that all questions of creed or politics should be rigorously excluded from its platforms, councils, gatherings and classes', which is why she so strongly supported its *feiseanna*, offering generous prizes.
 - ⁹ Cuffe's sister-in-law, Ellen, had stayed with her fox-hunting novelist, the 4th Earl on the Cuffes' Kilkenny estate, Desart Court, when they were newly married in 1881 (he had divorced his first wife, Maria Emma Preston, described by Oscar Wilde as 'the most lovely and dangerous woman in London', in 1878), but the house had subsequently lain mostly unoccupied until the 5th Earl returned in 1899. Otway Cuffe's realisation that he was the next and last in line seems to have focussed his desire to return to Ireland for good, at the same time that his brother returned to Desart Court. See G. Mauresceaux, 'Desart Court and Its Occupants', *Old Kilkenny Review* 1974, 21-25, and Lady Sybil Lubbock, *A Page from the Past: Memories of the Earl of Desart by Himself and his daughter* (London 1936).
 - ¹⁰ Lady Desart, 'Memoirs', 29 pages in XII sections (n.d.)
 - ¹¹ Lubbock, *A Page from the Past*, 200.
 - ¹² Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for our Time* (London 1994) 278. Morris's revisionist views of history, paralleled by Cuffe, Yeats, O'Grady and others in Ireland, insisted that a better future depended on a vision of an idealised, democratic, uncorrupted past (see Peter Faulkner, *William Morris and the Idea of England* (London 1992)).
 - ¹³ Lubbock, *A Page from the Past*, 147.
 - ¹⁴ Iris Origo, *Images and Shadows: Part of a Life* (New York 1971) 56.
 - ¹⁵ Lubbock, *A Page from the Past*, 12-13.
 - ¹⁶ Lubbock, *A Page from the Past*, 200-201, writes that her 'uncle's sense of aesthetic propriety

did not permit him to dress' as a stage Irishman nor in the more conspicuous 'antique and legendary saffron kilt'. William Gibson, Lord Ashbourne, ardent Gaelic Leaguer, and Willie Pearse, patriot and sculptor, were other male contemporary 'Irish-Irelanders' who adopted a national dress of their own devising.

- ¹⁷ Article published on the news of Captain Cuffe's untimely death in January 1912, reprinted in McAdams, *Ellen, Countess of Desart and Captain The Hon. Otway Cuffe*, 21.
- ¹⁸ Butler, 'Otway Cuffe', 7.
- ¹⁹ Lubbock, *A Page from the Past*, 201.
- ²⁰ McAdams, *Ellen, Countess of Desart and Captain The Hon. Otway Cuffe*, 11. Lady Desart, 'Memoirs', recounts that 'ancient and tumbled down tenements' were the rule in Kilkenny, 'the housing question' having been acute for generations.
- ²¹ See Peter V. Farrelly, *600 Years of Theatre in Kilkenny 1366-1966* (Kilkenny, n.d.). The theatre only closed in 1962, but as I write, its building is being gutted, leaving only its demoralised façade on which the city's stuccoed coat of arms (which Cuffe insisted be inscribed in Irish rather than the customary English) is nearly effaced.
- ²² Lady Desart, 'Memoirs'. For the reforming Protestant Irish nationalist Bigger, see Roger Dixon, 'Apostle of the living legend: Francis Joseph Bigger, Belfast's turn-of-the-century cultural Don Quixote' in Chris Moffat (ed.), *Fin de Siecle: Arts and Craft and the Celtic Revival in Ireland. Northern perspectives* (Belfast 1998). For the significance of pageants during this period, see Bowe and Cumming, *The Arts and Crafts Movements in Dublin and Edinburgh, 163-168*.
- ²³ Butler, 'Otway Cuffe', 10.
- ²⁴ A feasible conjecture, first made by Kenny, *Talbots Inch*, borne out by the casement windows and their hand-forged catches, repeated at Talbot's Inch and Aut Even. Lady Desart refers to current progressive co-operative attempts, championed by O'Grady, to farm on a human rather than a 'ranching' scale.
- ²⁵ First published in 1902 as 'Drama Breithe Criosta' in Gaelic in *The Weekly Freeman* and subsequently premiered in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin in January 1911; see Farrelly, *600 Years of Theatre in Kilkenny*.
- ²⁶ This was a continuation of cultivation he had begun at Sheestown. See Col N.T. Everard, 'Tobacco Growing in Ireland' in W.T. M-F. (ed.), *Irish Rural Life and Industry, with suggestions for the future* (Dublin 1907) 256; Sir Walter Raleigh's pioneering acclimatisation of tobacco in Youghal, Co Cork, c.1586, had begun Ireland's chequered history of cultivation. Lady Desart ceased albeit profitable production in 1913 since 'those for whose benefit it was intended took no interest at all'.
- ²⁷ Lady Desart, 'Memoirs'. For a biography of Scott, see Bowe and Cumming, *The Arts and Crafts Movements*, 190-1
- ²⁸ For Scott's seminal period working in the enlightened new London County Council Architects' Department, see Seán Rothery, *Ireland and the New Architecture 1900-1940* (Dublin 1991) 31-36. From 1894, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, inspired by William Morris's utopian socialist politics, were busy planning model community housing schemes, following the philosophy of Ebenezer Howard at Letchworth Garden City from 1904, and then, between 1907 and 1914, in Hampstead Garden Suburb. W.H. Lever had commissioned William and Segar Owen to build a first group of twenty-eight artisans' houses at Port Sunlight, at his Liverpool soap works, and George Cadbury began his model village of

Bournville near Birmingham in 1895. See Mervyn Miller, *Raymond Unwin: Garden Cities and Town planning* (Leicester 1992) and L.E. Waddilove, *One Man's Vision: The Story of the Joseph Rowntree Village Trust* (London 1954). It should also be remembered that Lady Desart would have been aware of the progressive workers' housing schemes of the Wiener Werkstatte architect, Josef Hofmann, in her family's native Austria, and been influenced by her own family's manifold enlightened philanthropic enterprises of an industrial nature (see below).

- ²⁹ Kenny, *Talbots Inch*. Scott's designs were reproduced in a supplement to *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, vol. 48 (28 July 1906) 604 and 620, which mentions the purpose-made mantle-pieces, cupboards, casement windows designed by Scott for houses for 'one of the big London surveyors', who 'did nothing without consulting his architect'; neither Kenny nor I have yet ascertained whether there was any connection between the client and the Irish revival, or if the houses are still extant. See Roderick Gradidge, *The Surrey Style* (Godalming 1991) and David Gebhard, *Charles F.A. Voysey, Architect* (Los Angeles 1975) for examples of specific works by Voysey which bear comparison with that of early Scott, e.g. Voysey's houses and institute for H. Briggs & Son, Normanton (1904) and studio for W.E.F. Britten, West Kensington (1891) may be compared to the Talbot's Inch cottages, while his Walters House, 'Vodin', near Woking, Surrey (1903) was surely a model for Aut Even, Lady Desart's house.

- ³⁰ Rothery, *Ireland and the New Architecture 1900-1940*, 31.

- ³¹ The book was introduced by the great Irish Revivalist Edward Martyn, for whom Scott had reconstructed a Norman tower house at Tulira Castle, Galway in 1902.

- ³² In the collection of the Office of Public Works, it is an exquisite signed and inscribed drawing in pen and ink, like all Scott's few extant designs; reproduced in John Graby (ed.), *150 Years of Architecture in Ireland – the RIAI 1839-1989* (Dublin 1989) 37.

- ³³ Kenny, *Talbots Inch*, 33, attributes Darcy's as the builders, Bourke's as the blacksmiths. Lady Desart writes that the local builder chosen 'proved utterly unworthy of the task, but was so little supervised by the architect that the defective workmanship was only discovered when the cottages threatened to fall to pieces in less than a decade after they were put up. Three out of the seven have practically had to be rebuilt.' All the houses, including Lady Desart's and that of her land agent, are now roofed in red concrete tiles. The much-loved suspension bridge, erected to allow access to the mill from Talbot's Inch when the Nore was in full spate, was washed away in the floods of March 1947.

- ³⁴ 'The New Birth of an Ancient Irish Industry', *The Lady of the House*, Christmas 1907, 24.

- ³⁵ See *The Irish Homestead*, 28 July 1906, 621, on 'A Model Cottage exhibited at the Munster – Connacht Exhibition', and articles on 'Cottage Gardening', 'A Village Hall: How to Have it, and How to Work it', 'A Plea for Village Halls', 'Village Hospitals', 'Model Labourers' Cottages', 'The Housing of the Irish Artisan', etc., in W.T. M-F. (ed.), *Irish Rural Life and Industry*.

- ³⁶ See W.T. M-F. (ed.), *Irish Rural Life and Industry*, 295 et seq.

- ³⁷ The DATI had set up itinerant courses of instruction in manual work in rural districts of Kilkenny c.1903. Ten scholars were chosen from the county and given instruction in drawing, design, wood-carving and inlaying wood. Their most successful work was featured in the prizewinning DATI exhibit at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exhibition. Eight of the original ten pupils were joined by a few more that winter, to follow a further course and form the nucleus of a guild wishing to 'manufacture furniture and woodwork of artistic character' (*The World's Work*, Irish number, ix, no. 54 (May 1907) 665).

- ³⁸ In 1906, T.W. Rolleston's criticism of the current proliferation of fussy, over-decorated, unfunctional, unaesthetic handwork 'only fit for a stall at a charitable bazaar' was published. He singled out 'carved milking-stools that no human being would ever dream of sitting on', and recommended carvers look at clock cases, hall chests and settles, large wood or turf boxes and simple small tables for inspiration ('Art Work at Irish Exhibitions', *Journal and Proceedings of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1906, 280-1).
- ³⁹ *The Irish Homestead*, 21 April, 1906, 317.
- ⁴⁰ 'The New Birth of an Ancient Irish Industry', *The Lady of the House*, Christmas 1907, np. This article refers to 'colossal glue boilers heated by steam', and an article on 'Art Metal Work and Wood Carving' in W.T. M-F. (ed.), *Irish Rural Life and Industry*, 229, published on the occasion of the Irish International Exhibition in Dublin 1907, reports that the woodworkers employed fifty to sixty hands. However, an advertisement for the woodworkers' expanded Dublin showroom, published in *The Irish Homestead* in December 1908, shows a mediaevalised carpenter hand-planing timber beside a rack of time-honoured tools, a small pot of glue at his clog-shod feet. Lady Desart writes of the resistance of the original Guildsmen to a 'foreign' foreman and to their rapid industrialisation (Lady Desart, 'Memoirs').
- ⁴¹ What little furniture has survived by the Kilkenny Woodworkers, when not deliberately copyist or for office use, bears close resemblance to the work of George Montague Ellwood, whose elegant work (e.g. mushroom finials and vertical pierced plank details) was well reproduced in the turn-of-the-century art press.
- ⁴² Where, in c.1911, the woodworkers duplicated the London signage of W. Potter & Sons of March 1903 on the original (left-hand) shop, leaving their signature clearly on the right-hand sign.
- ⁴³ Now in the collection of the National Museum of Ireland. Kenny, *Talbots Inch*, attributes this carving to William Emery.
- ⁴⁴ Sadly destroyed.
- ⁴⁵ Paul Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland* (Belfast 1992) 120, notes a similar piece, also available in oak, in an advertisement of 1911. This single piece is so deeply carved and ingenious in its design that it may well be the first piece done for the woodworkers by William Emery. Larmour suggests he joined them c.1910. Mrs Margaret Phelan (interview, July 1999) associates Emery with the woodcarving at J.F. Fuller's Church of the Ascension (1889), Rathdaire, Ballybrittas, Co Laois, although this is usually given to the Frenchman, Jean Baptist Martin. See also Kevin Curry, 'Patrick Corcoran (1879-1920) Kilkennyman, Nationalist and Woodcarver', *Old Kilkenny Review*, 1995, 6-10, and 'Patrick Corcoran: A postscript', *Old Kilkenny Review*, 1996, 7-8.
- ⁴⁶ Larmour writes of the 'good earnest endeavour, spirited designs and workmanship, and ... worthwhile recreation that was also remunerative' to be found in wood-carving schools popular throughout Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century. 'The teachers in most of the classes appear to have been mainly interested amateurs, usually hailing from the nearest 'big house', and often from the local rectory' (Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland*, 35).
- ⁴⁷ The catalogues of the Royal Dublin Society's annual Art Industries Exhibition from 1888 to c.1914 are an invaluable record of amateur and professional individuals and classes in wood-carving and their exhibits.
- ⁴⁸ The Kilfane class seems to have ceased by 1908, when Mrs Power's husband was made a canon.

- ⁴⁹ Historically, the Earls of Ormonde and Desart, as the largest landowners in Co Kilkenny, would alternate as Mayor of Kilkenny, but Captain Cuffe's was a representative election by the people of the city.
- ⁵⁰ Lady Desart, 'Memoirs'.
- ⁵¹ Capt. the Hon Otway Cuffe's opening speech as Chairman of the Mills, at their inauguration, 16 April 1906, reported in Lady Desart's 'Memoirs'. 'Ourselves Alone' was the self-reliant motto of the Gaelic League's recent political offshoot, the Sinn Féin party.
- ⁵² According to law, nobody under the age of fourteen was employed; see Margaret M. Phelan and Ann Cantwell eds, 'Katie O'Neill, Weaver and Mill Worker', *Old Kilkenny Review*, 1992, 1057-1064.
- ⁵³ Their ambitious aim, at a time when wool (which they imported from England) was commanding a particularly high price, was to produce clothes for ladies and gentlemen, currently only available as imports, and to 'manufacture ladies' clothes that have never been manufactured in Ireland before, both for the poor as well as for the richest in the land', maintaining sound quality and good value (inaugural speech by Mr A.B. Hunter, manager of the mills).
- ⁵⁴ Farrelly, *600 Years of Theatre in Kilkenny*, records that the popular new suspension bridge, specially illuminated at night like its surrounding impromptu theatre, 'served as a convenient short cut' and entrance hall for patrons attending the three hour performance in the mill grounds.
- ⁵⁵ Hubert Butler, 'Otway Cuffe', 11, writes: 'One evening, in the words of a reporter, "she entered into possession of her picturesque bijou residence, and the Corporation met her with swords and mace-bearers on the road from Sheestown. The fire brigade was there and pipe bands and an address was read by the Mayor and the town clerk". She responded: "I dream of Talbot's Inch becoming the rallying-point for all Kilkenny, not only of industry, but for all ... that makes for joy and harmony and the higher pleasures that refine the mind and elevate the spirit and the soul."'
- ⁵⁶ 'The Good Fairy of Talbot's Inch', *The Lady of the House*, 15 December 1910, np and 49. Lady Desart does not seem to have taken up residence at Aut Even until 1910, having previously made short visits to Ireland from London or the Warren House, Stanmore.
- ⁵⁷ See Brendan Grimes, *Irish Carnegie Libraries: A Catalogue and Architectural History* (Dublin 1998) 168-171. Designed by architects Tyars and Jago with E. Stewart Lowey & Sons of Dublin, it shows an early use of concrete blocks in Ireland.
- ⁵⁸ According to Jeremy Williams, *A Companion Guide to Architecture in Ireland 1837-1921* (Dublin 1994) 248. A tablet declaring that the bridge was erected during the Mayoralty of Otway Cuffe is placed on its Castle end beneath the tablet taken from the much-loved but impractical old hump-backed bridge which it replaced; this latter had been erected during the mayoralty of Cuffe's grandfather, the 2nd Earl of Desart.
- ⁵⁹ Letter from Lady Desart 'To the Kilkenny Woodworkers', 6 January 1912, published in McAdams, *Ellen, Countess of Desart and Captain The Hon. Otway Cuffe*, 22.
- ⁶⁰ Another central European connection with a Co Kilkenny craft industry was when, in 1903, Captain R.H. Prior-Wandesforde founded the Castlecomer Basket and Perambulator Factories, employing a young Austrian, Joseph Schovrek, as instructor and manager. In 1908 they amalgamated with the Kilkenny Woodworkers. Hirsch (1831-1896) was the grandson of the first Jewish landowner in Bavaria, ennobled in 1818. He was the first Jewish benefactor to conceive of and plan the large-scale resettlement of Jews so they would be rehabilitated as free

farmers in their own colonies, emphasizing the land as the source of all values. See Kurt Grunwald, *'Turkenhirsch': A Study of Baron Maurice de Hirsch, Entrepreneur and Philanthropist* (Jerusalem 1966). The parallels with Ireland must have been obvious to Lady Desart, although she felt that Ireland's demoralised state was analogous with that of Russia pre-1917. Gabriel Murray's unpublished manuscript, *The Countess of Desart*, is an invaluable research source here, giving excellent references to documentation on Hirsch (author's collection).

⁶¹ McAdams, *Ellen, Countess of Desart and Captain The Hon. Otway Cuffe*, 24.

⁶² *ibid.*, 26.

⁶³ 'She is studying it herself, and finds it far from easy' ('The Good Fairy of Talbot's Inch', loc. cit., np).

⁶⁴ McAdams, *Ellen, Countess of Desart and Captain The Hon. Otway Cuffe*, 27. She also refused, on principle, to collect tax from her Kilkenny Woodworkers employees, which resulted in a horse being confiscated from her and sold to meet the resultant costs.

⁶⁵ Kenny, *Talbots Inch*, 36. This building, which bears an attractive plaque recording its date and Lady Desart's monogram amid Celtic interlace, is now a private residence.

⁶⁶ They were photographed on a glass plate negative (no. 28) by the National Museum of Ireland, in whose collection they now are, and reproduced opposite page 106 in Henry F. Berry, *A History of the Royal Dublin Society* (London 1915).