



*1 – Mezzotint of Sir James Caldwell
(courtesy Daniel Kinahan)*

The artistic and cultural activities of the Caldwells of Castle Caldwell, 1750-1783

TOBY BARNARD

THE CALDWELLS BELONGED TO A SECTION OF IRISH PROTESTANT SOCIETY thought to have contributed much to the material and intellectual worlds of eighteenth-century Ireland. A Caldwell arrived from Scotland during the plantation of Ulster early in the seventeenth century, and settled first in Enniskillen. Soon the family covered its tracks as traders with the acquisition of land. As part of the transformation, the Caldwells moved to Rossbeg, later renamed Castle Caldwell, on the shores of Lough Erne. Ornamented with a baronetcy in 1683, they settled into the modes of well-to-do landowners.¹ However, they were not in the uppermost stratum (of peers), nor did they ever serve as members of the Dublin parliament. Their circumstances, while comfortable, were not easy. Measured by known income – approximately £2,300 in 1770 – they fell below the hurdle, conventionally set at £3,000 per annum, which had to be vaulted to enter the peerage.²

Much of the interest of the Caldwells lies in their idiosyncrasies. Although part of the Protestant élite of Hanoverian Ireland, they do not wholly conform to the stereotypes of their order. Some of the family archive survives to tantalise. Intermittently, the eighteenth-century Caldwells' spending, patronage and cultural interests can be illumined. This account, inevitably constrained by the fragmentary records, considers their houses – primarily Castle Caldwell, but also in Dublin – how they were modified, furnished and used. In addition to trying to reconstruct the physical realities of the Caldwells' lives, this essay speculates about the attitudes that inspired or arose from the material worlds.

— I —

James Caldwell (Plate 1), born about 1720, succeeded his father as 4th Baronet in 1744.³ In 1753 he married Elizabeth Hort, a daughter of the Archbishop of Tuam. Caldwell had received a conventional education – a good school in Dundalk, then Trinity College, Dublin. To complete his preparation, he was despatched on an educational grand tour. Such finishing to give a high gloss to those of his rank was becoming more common, but remained far from universal. In later life, Caldwell would utilise the connections that he had established during his time abroad. Initially, he studied in France, but he also took in Switzerland and northern Italy. Life outside Ireland appealed enough for him to enter the Austrian imperial army. This seems to have been a congenial episode, and, in terms of the lasting links and rewards, profitable. He was made a knight of the Holy Roman Empire and a count. He was also given personal mementoes by the empress, Maria Theresa. Two points are worth extracting from this continental phase. The empire was a Catholic state. Its army, ecclesiastical institutions and territories offered refuge to others from Ireland, but mostly Catholics. Protestants did venture to Vienna and Prague, but seldom made careers there.

Sir James Caldwell thrived in the cosmopolitan world, but other than to exploit his well-placed contacts he was not specific about what he had seen and liked in Central Europe – like county Fermanagh, a borderland, but a rather different one. The all-too-obvious legacy from the imperial sojourn was dissatisfaction with the smaller arena in which, once returned to Ireland in 1749, he now strutted, and the inadequate outlets for and appreciation of his talents. Caldwell developed an obsession. He wanted his imperial distinctions to be matched by similar recognition in Ireland. He craved elevation to the peerage. The craving possessed him. Most of his recorded activities throughout the remainder of his life centred on this obsessive quest. Indeed, the documents that survive have been carefully weeded and preserved by Caldwell – and, it has to be suspected, doctored by him – to back his claims to ennoblement. Reasonably, he might suppose that a hereditary honour from an ancient empire would bring him the Irish distinction that he sought. The Empire was vast and polytheistic. There, unlike in the Ireland of his day, it was possible for those of confessions other than the State religion of Catholicism to serve and prosper. This difference in policy, however, was not one that he ever directly acknowledged.

The impact of Caldwell's long stay in Continental Europe is obvious in some of the arrangements that he introduced onto his Fermanagh inheritance. He was unusual, but hardly unique in his exposure to foreign modes. The ideological and artistic consequences of travel for the *moeurs* of the members of the incipient Irish Protestant ascendancy have yet to be fully explored. The grand tourists from Ireland

who have been studied in detail – Edward Lovett Pearce, Lord Charlemont, Joseph Leeson – were those who headed to Italy and the Mediterranean.⁴ More numerous and arguably more typical were those who meandered through the Low Countries (popular for education and medical training), the German states, Switzerland and the Empire. This was a point emphasised by the contemporary bookseller, George Faulkner.⁵ Caldwell, despite the lengthy period in Austria, always communicated with his acquaintances there in the French language, not (as might have been expected) in German. Caldwell, to judge from the surviving letters and memoranda, noted most keenly agricultural and proto-industrial novelties, the look of places and inhabitants, architectural spectacles, diet and music.

Immersion in Continental ways was combined with familiarity with London and other parts of England, notably Bath and the west of England. It was a visit to kinsfolk in Derbyshire, not the west of Ireland or central Europe, that provoked Caldwell's observation, 'the natives are rather slovenly in their dress, but within doors have everything very neat and are in their way very civil and good natured.'⁶ Despite the Caldwell's origins in Scotland, and Caldwell's eagerness to discover his aristocratic antecedents there, he never visited the northern kingdom. Within Ireland, too, his travels seem to have followed well-trodden routes. His circuits were concentrated in the north, Dublin and its environs, with occasional forays into the midlands. He had little or no first-hand knowledge of Munster. Instead he relied on information from correspondents there, such as the younger Sir Richard Cox from Dunmanway, and members of the family who travelled further south.⁷

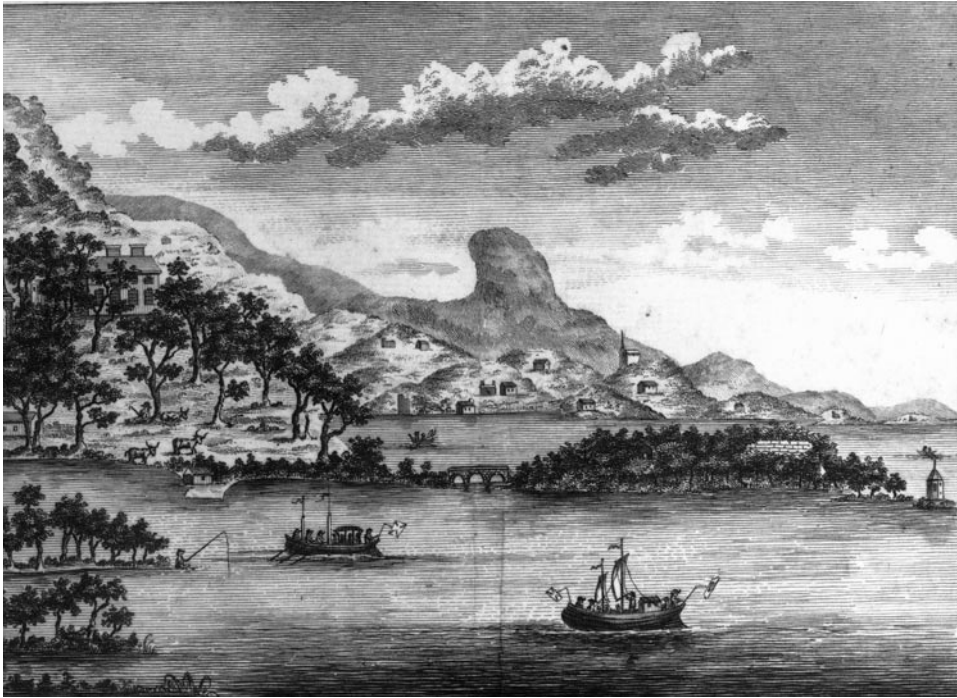
The range of experiences and influences that Caldwell brought to the business of estate management in county Fermanagh was greatly enlarged by his marriage in 1753. His bride was Elizabeth Hort, the eldest daughter of Josiah Hort, successively Bishop of Kilmore and Archbishop of Tuam. Hort was disliked as yet another prelate imported from England, and castigated for neglecting his duties. It was alleged that he had shouted so loudly at an errant coachman that he lost his voice. This misfortune explained his reluctance to preach; the search for a restorative justified long absences from Ireland.⁸ Nevertheless, Hort belonged to a circle of zealous Protestants with a taste for charitable works.⁹ In addition, his long occupancy of bishoprics enabled him to improve the family fortunes.¹⁰ Archbishop Hort left his children well educated, steeped in the fundamentals of practical Christianity, and financially secure. Elizabeth was bequeathed £5,000, together with the Hort's house in Dawson Street, Dublin, 'a pretty house large enough for an Irish peer and elegantly furnished', its furniture, silver plate (reckoned to amount to 1,600 ounces) and paintings. She was also to have the jewels that she usually wore; they were valued at £700.¹¹

Such were the financial difficulties facing Caldwell that his wife's dowry was quickly treated as an asset to relieve his own embarrassments. In the short term, the

Dublin house was let to a series of tenants (including bishops), for £150 for one parliamentary winter.¹² The tenancies were not altogether satisfactory. Prospective tenants demanded reductions in the rent.¹³ Meanwhile, the condition of the house deteriorated.¹⁴ Rather than themselves conducting the troublesome negotiations for short-term lets, the Caldwells made a more permanent agreement with an architect and property developer, Francis Sandys, reputed to be ‘so very nick-knack and clever in many things’.¹⁵ Sandys leased the house for 140 years at an annual £66 (Alderman Crampton had offered £60).¹⁶ He reordered, redecorated and furnished afresh the interior, so that by 1773 he could sublet it for six months to Sir Richard St George at a rent of £140.¹⁷ The arrangement did not entirely free the Caldwells from worry about the Dublin house. Furthermore, it created a fresh problem. Where would they stay when they came to town? Caldwell on his own could lodge at an inn, rent rooms or cosher with friends. But in the 1770s Lady Caldwell proposed to bring the family to Dublin, and had to contrive where they might be accommodated respectably and economically. This scheme, as will be seen, involved her in demeaning pleas to grander relations. By this juncture, a combination of factors – the expense of the regime that Caldwell insisted on in county Fermanagh and his own inclinations – recommended a contraction of the country establishment and life in or near the capital. Before these plans could really take concrete form, illness obliged the couple to dip into the cures of Bath. Elizabeth Caldwell died in 1778. Sir James, as a widower, was freer to follow his own fancies, accepting invitations in England (for example, at the Lascelles’ Harewood) and inhaling the sea air of Sidmouth in Devonshire.

— II —

According to the laws of the time, Sir James Caldwell, on marriage, gained control over much of his wife’s property. Yet she did not relinquish interest in the Dublin house that she had inherited, even when she agreed that it must be let. In the mid-1750s, the couple’s life was focussed on the estate beside Lough Erne. In part, this was because Sir James Caldwell’s attention shifted to the improvement of mansion and lands. Also, the birth of children restricted Elizabeth Caldwell’s jaunting. Soon her husband’s incurable restiveness would uproot him, turning him into an intermittent absentee. However, during the earlier years of marriage, the couple shared happily in the schemes to modernise, enlarge and embellish house and grounds. In practice, owing to the frequent absences of Sir James Caldwell, much of the planning and superintendence of the works fell to Lady Caldwell. As overseer, she was not just the passive executor of Sir James’s orders, she also took decisions about the design and furnishing of the house. In doing so, she drew on her own observations and preferences, and on the suggestions of friends and kindred.



2 – *Castle Caldwell*
1780, engraving

An early example of Elizabeth Caldwell's access to the aesthetic judgement of a larger circle came in 1752 (before she was married). Having enquired about the repair and possible copying of Hort family portraits, a correspondent in England recommended Nathaniel Hone as 'the best painter here of that sort'. Hone, it was reported, 'is a very fine man, who keeps his coach, the son of an Irish tobacconist, and he means very shortly to go and visit his friends in Ireland, and to stay there about 3 weeks.' Elizabeth Hort was assured that Hone could draw a miniature from the large portrait of her father in the Dublin house.¹⁸ Portraiture soon gave way to the more urgent priority of improving Castle Caldwell (Plate 2). At first, the Caldwelles contented themselves with renewing the roof and internal rearrangements. Storm damage also necessitated patching.¹⁹ In 1758 an addition of two rooms to enhance the look of the main façade was considered. Again, there was no shortage of advice. Lady Caldwell's brother, the future Sir John Hort, explained to her the advantages of collecting as many opinions as possible. Once a draft design had been prepared, 'let it lie open in the parlour, explain to all who ask and hear what they have to say from Inigo Jones down to Darley, which may chance to give you twenty little improvements you never dreamt of.'²⁰

Within the Caldwells' ambit there was no shortage of advisers – expert, *soi-disant* expert, or ignorant but opinionated. John Hort and the redoubtable Lady Arbella Denny, distantly related to the Caldwells, freely offered guidance.²¹ Later, Caldwell listed among his papers copies of the designs for Lord Fairfax's house in York, Sir Francis Dashwood's West Wycombe Park, and Lord Marchmont's seat in Scotland.²² Dashwood and Marchmont were known to Caldwell, and so acquaintanceship may be enough to explain the presence of those designs at Castle Caldwell. However, another paper by Carr, Fairfax's architect, may indicate that Carr was considered for works at Castle Caldwell, or even consulted.²³ Carr's only recorded link with Ulster, in Armagh, would come later through Archbishop Robinson.²⁴

No evidence identifies the main architect of the rebuilding of Castle Caldwell in the early 1760s. This uncertainty may reflect exactly the collaboration of amateurs proposed by Hort to his sister. Practical needs, as well as the grandiose notions of Sir James Caldwell and the wish of the couple to put a distinctive and modern stamp on their home, prompted the building campaign. Castle Caldwell had to house a lengthening train of children, Caldwell's widowed mother and seven servants.²⁵

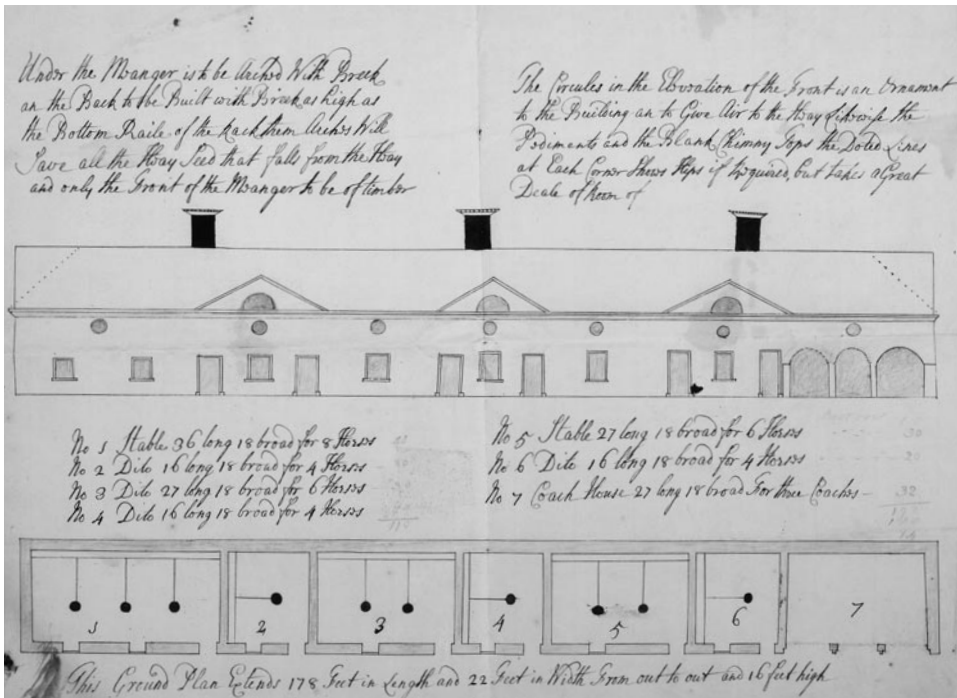
If the identity of the architect is unknown, the 'conductor' of building operations was Whitmore Davis. Described as 'architect and bricklayer' and initially as of Newbliss, county Monaghan, Davis was active in the district.²⁶ When approached about the Castle Caldwell job in 1762, he was working at Edward Madden's house at Spring Grove, near Clones.²⁷ It fell to Lady Caldwell, with her husband away first in London and then in Dublin, to negotiate terms with him. Davis submitted a detailed schedule of what he would oversee. The east and south fronts of the ground floor were to be of hammered stone, ten feet high, clear of the vaults. The next floor was to be fifteen feet in height, and the attic seven feet and coved within. Brick would be used for the bulk of the walling, but a chamfered base of cut stone with rusticated quoins and a frontispiece according to the Doric order gave greater presence. The choice of Doric may have paid tribute to Caldwell's military prowess since the order had martial connotations. It would remind of his foreign service and his more recent exploits in raising locally a troop of light infantry. Also there would be cut-stone window surrounds and sills. The cornice would conceal the gutter to deal with rainwater, clearly a worry in the damp locality. Inside, oak was to be used for doors and for the windows, crown glass either from Bristol or Newcastle for the glazing. Davis undertook to complete the building according to the schedule for £840.²⁸

Davis, assisted by his son, was to superintend the work of 'common stone layers, stone cutters otherwise masons, bricklayers, carpenters, slaters, plasterers and glaziers'. He boasted 'never work of this kind done so cheap in Ireland'. Soon

enough, winter, with the Christmas holiday and poor weather, interrupted operations. Ominously it was reported in December 1762 that the workmen were dispersing to Dublin for the impending festival.²⁹ Davis had offered to vary the terms on which the men were engaged with the changing seasons. While the hours of daylight were long, they would receive a daily rate; during shorter winter days, the men would be paid ‘by the great’, that is for what they actually did.³⁰ Their departure, prompted by wintry conditions, meant that building was suspended. This delay gave Lady Caldwell an opportunity to revise Davis’s terms.³¹ Originally he had asked to be paid one guinea weekly, together with a room in which to lodge, diet, an allowance of ale and specific travelling expenses. This pay was reduced to 18s weekly. At the same time, the wages of the masons and bricklayers were lowered from the original weekly 10s 6d to 7s 7d.³² Elizabeth Caldwell hoped to bring Davis down to a weekly wage of 12s and the skilled workers to a mere 6s 6d. She achieved a reduction by inviting others – Robert Wallace and William Moore – to tender with alternatives.³³ In the event, she stuck to Davis, but was soon wondering if Wallace would not have been preferable. In the summer of 1763, Lady Caldwell complained that Davis and the masons had succumbed to what she euphemistically

3 – Whitmore Davis, DESIGN FOR STABLES AT CASTLE CALDWELL

(courtesy John Rylands Library, Manchester)



termed ‘whiskey fever’.³⁴ Yet, even with such failings, Davis was entrusted with other projects on the estate, among them a stable block (Plate 3).

Davis brought his own familiar groups of specialist workers to Castle Caldwell. For some tasks the Caldwells engaged others. Their preferred carpenter was from Dublin – Patrick Gernon. His contract required him to execute the commission, ‘completely, thoroughly and workmanlike, according to the exact rules of such work done in the city of Dublin’. Gernon was to attend and oversee the work in person. As supervisor he would be paid 15s weekly, over and above payment for specific pieces of work. Gernon, evidently the smart Dubliner, would travel in the stage coach as far as Cavan and then be provided with a horse to ride to Castle Caldwell. It was envisaged that he might also have to journey to Sligo to find suitable timber. He would be paid 4s 10d daily for such trips.³⁵ It is probable that Sir James Caldwell in Dublin located Gernon. Meanwhile, his wife contracted with the best glazier in Enniskillen.³⁶

In the intimate company of landowners with the Caldwells’ resources and status, information about the merits and demerits of particular operatives was readily shared. Shortcomings were soon spotted and reported. Within the Caldwells’ neighbourhood, the Wards were builders to be avoided, but Alexander Boggs was approved. Yet, the Wards, despite a low reputation, found work at Castle Caldwell, as elsewhere in the north-west.³⁷ Boggs (also known as Bogg and Bagg) emerges as a more substantial figure, with some claim to be regarded as an architect rather than simply a master mason and contracting builder. He is credited with the design of the church at Belleek, a commission probably entrusted to him by the Caldwells.³⁸ He also built the barracks and some houses in Belturbet.³⁹ Boggs, on the strength of Caldwell’s recommendation and his work for Mervyn Archdale at Castle Archdale (also on Lough Erne), was employed as clerk of the works at Ardbraccan, where the bishop of Meath, Henry Maxwell, was erecting a mansion. Maxwell deemed Boggs ‘an active stirring man’.⁴⁰ Indeed, Boggs’s reputation ensured his employment by other Church of Ireland bishops in Ulster.⁴¹ The Caldwells, having undertaken their works, added to the store of knowledge within their circle about pitfalls and pleasures in using the different operatives.

— III —

With structural work completed, the house had to be equipped and run in appropriate style. Once more, it is difficult to separate the choices of Lady Caldwell and Sir James. Furthermore, the occasional illumination, through bills and letters, may be misleading about which spouse was responsible for specific decisions. Bills for furnishings and artefacts were usually sent to Sir James Caldwell, and it was he who normally paid them. It does not follow that it was he who had chosen the supplier or

the particular object. Equally, the guidance that rained down on Elizabeth Caldwell, from her brother and female relations and friends, was not necessarily heeded. During the 1760s, motherhood tended to maroon her at Castle Caldwell. She was eager to keep abreast of changing fashions in dress and furniture. She did not want for advice, some of it unsolicited. A sister commiserated with her in her rural isolation and urged her to plunge anew into the hectic round of Dublin pleasures.⁴² Later, her brother, by now settled in Portugal as British Consul, also blamed Castle Caldwell for her declining health, and counselled escape to the sun. Elizabeth Caldwell herself had at first shared her husband's enthusiasms. Gradually, as she was obliged by his gadding to maintain the household in Fermanagh, she lost patience. She wanted the costly establishment at Castle Caldwell scaled down, and for the family to remove itself to Dublin. But there, the Dawson Street residence was no longer available. Lady Caldwell asked her grander connection, Lady Shelburne, if she and her family could stay in Shelburne House on St Stephen's Green while its owners were absent. She was snubbed.⁴³ Instead, Lady Caldwell contemplated taking a more modest place in Dublin for £70 per annum. Further economies could be practised by bringing essential furnishings from Castle Caldwell.

By 1773 Lady Caldwell believed that her husband's zest for provincial life had abated. He himself had earlier admitted his restlessness. In 1757, after his first extended bout of estate management, he grew bored, and he searched for fresh outlets for his energies. For a time he found satisfying alternatives – raising a militia troop, proffering political advice and writing tracts. In turn, he wearied of the novel activities, and redirected his efforts onto Castle Caldwell. He aimed to make the estate a nonpareil through the entertainments that he offered and the innovations and improvements that he sponsored among his tenants. The projects were all linked to his quest to be raised to the Irish peerage. His elegant manner of living would demonstrate definitively how well qualified he was for the honour.

That manner of living, as will be suggested, owed something to what he remembered from his years in central Europe and more to what he observed of the arrangements of grander neighbours. Less easily distinguished are the preferences introduced by his long-suffering wife. Certainly, Elizabeth Caldwell picked the brains of her correspondents. From Dublin, Lady Arbella Denny guided about wallpapers, sofas, silver and chimney pieces. Lady Arbella, a formidable widow distantly related to the Caldwells, was a stickler for social niceties, many of which were being abandoned by the casual young.⁴⁴ On the Caldwells' behalf, she procured looking glasses from Booker and chimney pieces of variegated Egyptian marble from Darley.⁴⁵ She sketched designs for sofas and suggested that the horse hair for stuffing them could be had more cheaply in the country.⁴⁶ She was imperious in her recommendations about papering rooms. She urged Lady Caldwell to hang one

room with a white grounded paper similar to that in her own dressing room at Peafield. Lady Arbella claimed that she had used eleven sorts of paper, at a total cost of approximately £8. She informed her country kinswoman that a fine yellow paper resembling caffoy could be had for eight or nine shillings per dozen. She admired red paper that imitated flock as 'very handsome', but warned that it was hard to match with fabrics such as moreen and serge. Stripes would do well for a bedroom but looked very ugly in the drawing room. Even so, this arbiter of taste conceded that Lord Hertford was said to have furnished an apartment in his London house with it. She further warned her country cousin that, 'a great many people of the first fashion have the paper of their rooms no lower than the sur base'. Others papered below the chair rail: an effect that she felt prettier, since it made the room look finished.⁴⁷ She applauded Lady Caldwell's choice of green and white checked fabric in the drawing room since it 'will be much the mode'. She also wrote, 'I much approve of your design of the bookcases with looking glass doors. They will be commodious & cheerful.' She went on to warn that they were likely to cost £40.⁴⁸

Perhaps the most striking instance of the assistance offered by Lady Arbella Denny, both in aesthetic judgement and practicalities, relates to an earlier commission for a silver coffee pot wanted by the Caldwells. It was to be given as a present, perhaps at a wedding between a Gregg and a Walshe. Lady Arbella tried three silversmiths in Dublin.

I, finding Mr Walsh the dearest, have rejected him. I bespoke a coffee jug to hold something more than a quart from Mr Holmes. It is to come to seven pounds, of which 1 guinea and half is to be for fashion. Mr Walsh would have 3 guineas for fashion & Mr Champian 46s. I am not to take it after 'tis made if I don't like it, but I have given him a Dutch coffee jug that I brought out of England to make it by.

Nearly two months later, Lady Arbella reported that

the coffee pot I bespoke of Holmes, who is to have 7s 10d per ounce, it all came to £11 & be done in a fortnight. Mr Walsh would have 8s & no less. A smaller coffee pot I am satisfied would be ungenteel to give, so 'tis best at once as Sir James & your ladyship says do it well at first, for that satisfies.⁴⁹

The coffee pot may have been given away. But even in the matter of gifts, those of the first fashion, or aspiring to be of it, trod warily between the genteel and ungenteel. In finishing their own houses, such avatars of refinement and discernment as Lady Arbella Denny and the Caldwells faced even greater opportunities and hazards for impressing or distressing. Little of the detail of the fixtures and fittings at Castle Caldwell can now be reconstructed. The meagre scraps of evidence show conventional choices, with the Caldwells following the prevailing modes. They ordered

their mirrors from Booker, their knives and forks with handles stained green from Read's, their books and stationery from George Faulkner – all in Dublin.⁵⁰ Families of the consequence of the Caldwells announced their lineage and linkages through the paintings that hung in their houses. Lady Caldwell, as has been mentioned, wanted to safeguard the portrait of her father, Archbishop Hort. Whether or not Hone undertook the work is unknown. In the representation of themselves and their offspring, the Caldwells did not lack advice. Sir James, while dining at Castle Ward, was buttonholed by Lady Clanwilliam. She sang the praises of John Trotter, recently returned to Ireland from Rome. However, Caldwell escaped her clutches without committing himself to Trotter.⁵¹

The one artist known to have been patronised by the Caldwells was based in London. Sir James Caldwell went to England at the end of 1759 to further his projects, and returned there in 1760. While pursuing political and personal objectives, he had time to commission works from Thomas Frye. Of Irish background, Frye had removed to London, where he won fame through his promotion of the Bow porcelain factory. Concurrently he continued to paint portraits, but also scraped a dazzlingly innovative series of mezzotints of male and female heads (Plate 5). Caldwell subscribed to the first dozen of the series. Frye aimed to have two-hundred subscriptions: subscribers would pay one guinea in advance and another guinea on publication. At the same time, Caldwell paid Frye six guineas for his own picture in 'crayons'. Frye also repaired and finished two miniatures for Caldwell (Plate 4).⁵²

Interest and even practical accomplishment in painting and drawing were

4 – Bill of Thomas Frye, 1760, 'For repairing and finishing two miniatures', and for Sir James Caldwell's 'picture in Crayon' (courtesy John Rylands Library, Manchester)

133/28/21 Sir James Caldwell – to Tho: Frye
 Oct: 9 1760

check

To repairing and finishing two Miniatures	2	2	0
To Sir James's Picture in Crayons	6	6	0
To a furnished Gold frame & Glass	2	12	6
To the Subscription for 12 Mezzotints heads	2	2	0
To 7 Frames & Glasses for D ^o & 8 ff	2	16	0
			<u>£ 15, 18, 6</u>



Thomas Frye (1710-62)

*5 – A YOUNG MAN HOLDING
AN OPEN BOOK BEFORE HIM,
A LIGHTED CANDLE TO THE
RIGHT,*

*1760, mezzotint from series of 12
(collection of Anthony O'Connor
and the author)*



6 – SIR JAMES CALDWELL

1760 (private collection)

attributes approved among those of the Caldwells' station. Lady Arbella Denny had an informed interest in this, as in most other matters. Among the Caldwells, one daughter developed talents that were reckoned to surpass the customary. Arbella Caldwell, a goddaughter of Lady Arbella, was frequently praised for her facility in music and painting. She compiled and illustrated a journal of a tour through the north of Ireland.⁵³ She supplied Arthur Young, the agricultural propagandist, with sketches to remind him of what he had seen on his visit to the north of Ireland and thereby to assist him in writing a detailed account. Her godmother, Lady Arbella, bequeathed her money for drawing equipment. Seemingly the younger woman had unusual culinary skills, and delighted her godmother with the gift of a 'badger ham'.⁵⁴ In 1778 Arbella Caldwell recorded her part in a droll masquerade when, at last, she, her siblings and her mother came to stay in Dublin. 'Half the part was acted and for the rest, I went around talking Irish sometimes to those of my own class.'⁵⁵ Her *joie de vivre* made her a favourite. The proficiency in Irish may suggest a growing fascination with indigenous culture among contemporaries. The most conspicuous example was Charlotte Brooke, who had a residual Fermanagh link. Arbella Caldwell's talents led to her copying (or perhaps even forging) documents wanted by her father in his increasingly desperate bid for ennoblement.⁵⁶ Alas, no example of Arbella Caldwell's writing or painting has been identified to assess whether her abilities would bear comparison with those of Laetitia Bushe or Mary Delany.

— IV —

Arthur Young, to whom Arbella Caldwell sent drawings, was one of numerous visitors who attested to the pleasures of Castle Caldwell. Young's *Tour* gratifyingly publicised Caldwell's sustained and apparently successful campaign of improvement on his holdings.⁵⁷ Indeed, the regime that he had introduced at Castle Caldwell was intended to elicit exactly this kind of praise. Being feted as a model landlord could only strengthen his claim on a peerage. Many of Caldwell's innovations were common to the improvers who abounded by the mid-eighteenth century. Altruism and public spirit combined with mercenary calculations about how best to raise the revenues of estates. In the case of Caldwell, the need to lift his income above £3,000 was an unacknowledged motive in his strenuous exertions. Increases of this magnitude were never achieved.

Less usual in Caldwell's dispositions were three elements. He devised celebratory pageants to reward tenants and workers. The most elaborate, billed 'the jubilee', was advertised to a wider world, not just by processions through his territory, but in printed accounts. Caldwell appreciated the potential of print to bring his achievements to wider notice. Self-advertisement of this sort had occurred before:



7 – *Castle Caldwell, c.1880*
(Lawrence Collection, courtesy National Library of Ireland)



Richard Purcell at Kanturk and the younger Sir Richard Cox at Dunmanway were obvious precursors.⁵⁸

Music featured prominently in the gala, and also in the private entertainments with which the Caldwell's guests were regaled. Again, this was a constituent of the diversions in other Irish country houses, such as the Edgeworths at Edgeworthstown.⁵⁹ Yet Caldwell's recitals and performances differed. He maintained a wind ensemble. He took great pains and spent prodigiously to procure instruments, printed and manuscript music, and a musical director. Traditional melodies may have been interwoven with the imported novelties. Nevertheless, it is the latter that are documented.⁶⁰ Caldwell conceded that music-making was a personal indulgence.⁶¹ As he intended, it beguiled visitors, who might be serenaded as they were rowed across Lough Erne towards Castle Caldwell. Sir James hardly rivalled the Esterhazys with their patronage of Haydn, but the effect of his band struck the knowing as more reminiscent of Germany and the Austrian Empire than of Britain and Ireland. In 1777 Owen Wynne of Haselwood (the Wynnes, like the Caldwell's, were a family with strong military traditions) enthused over his recent stay at Castle Caldwell, 'your sweet and agreeable place, which for its beauty and situation, I affirm, (in my opinion) far exceeds any place that I ever saw either in England or in Ireland.' Wynne, having praised the regimentation of servants and tenants, concluded

I confess you appeared to me in the light of a worthy German prince, having a regular household well kept up with a proper uniform, every person in their proper station well disciplined and each striving to prove their gratitude to his master by their several exertions.⁶²

It is tempting to trace Caldwell's passion for and preferences in music to his Continental experiences. At Castle Caldwell it was integral to the benign and uplifting order. So too were the content and service of meals. In earlier years, Caldwell had been exposed to habits rather different from those which prevailed in provincial Ireland. Yet, he seldom recalled those foreign manners. Instead, it is clear that he was fascinated by the domestic arrangements of the houses into which he was welcomed in Ireland and England. He noted the number of servants and their pay. He commented on the look of houses, whether fashionably new (like Castle Ward) or outmoded and indifferent (Rostrevor). Caldwell was an educated analyst of architecture. This discrimination showed strongly when he tried to persuade the actor, David Garrick, to visit the north of Ireland. In an effort to overcome Garrick's reluctance, Caldwell described the houses that he might see. He deployed his knowledge of the families in the various seats.⁶³ However, in his surviving observations, he never compared Irish buildings explicitly with those in England, let alone on the Continent.

In writing to his wife, Caldwell took special care to note how meals were served. In particular, the dessert fascinated Caldwell. At Castle Ward, the latest vogue of queen's ware – the lighter pottery pioneered by Wedgwood – had already appeared by 1772.⁶⁴ He carped at the limited choice and poor quality of hothouse fruits offered. Implicitly, he was proclaiming the superiority of his own produce. Yet, the 'grapery' at Castle Caldwell was not big enough to allow melons to be grown in 1764. However, by 1772, Caldwell's hothouses were supplying pineapples, peaches, nectarines and muscatel grapes.⁶⁵ With a well-attuned ear, he also evaluated the musical accompaniments. Undoubtedly, Caldwell was storing up ideas for what might or might not be tried at Castle Caldwell. On occasion, he clearly felt that the delicacies and music offered by his grand hosts fell short of what his own house could supply. Only one bad fiddle and a bassoon was the withering verdict on a gathering under the auspices of the Ogles at Newry.

These impressions of the domestic arrangements in the establishments at Castle Ward and Ravensdale, and of Lord Clanbrassil at Dundalk, were retailed to Lady Caldwell.⁶⁶ No doubt she was delighted to hear from the Fortescues' Ravensdale in county Louth

that the living here is the very highest, much in the French way, few things substantial. It is the fashion to have the dessert laid on after the second course without the cloths being taken away & the bottles and glasses set down after

the table is cleared and the cloth taken away and the bottles and glasses set down again. The dessert is made out very fine things: creams, cascures [custards?], and sweetmeats as they have but very little fruit and that but bad. No pineapples but very fine melons; excellent wines but no great variety.

The following year, dinner at Rochfort, county Westmeath, was described: ‘A complete service of plate covers and all: 2 soups 2 removes 9 and 9: a dessert in the highest taste, all sorts of wine – burgundy, champagne.’ For Lady Caldwell, vicarious enjoyment of her husband’s pleasures palled. Executing his lofty notions at Castle Caldwell had seriously overstrained their resources. Early in 1773 she called halt to his extravagances. Without ready cash she had been unable to pay the postage on the letters that arrived. Indeed, she had been reduced to selling eggs and tobacco left in the house in order to have a little money.⁶⁷

After 1772, the high style maintained at Castle Caldwell was reduced. There was even talk of closing the house as an economy. Lady Caldwell managed to bring the children still living at home to Dublin. Lady Shelburne had refused to assist, but Lady Arbella Denny proved a benefactor, just as earlier she had been a counsellor.⁶⁸ The death of Elizabeth Caldwell in 1778 made her husband rely more heavily on his daughters, notably Arbella. He consoled himself with visits to imposing English mansions, tried to recover his own health at Bath and Sidmouth, and persisted in the delusive pursuit of his peerage.⁶⁹

When he returned periodically to Castle Caldwell, a chief concern was to sort, preserve, copy and select the papers that might assist his claim to ennoblement. The routine documentation of domestic spending – so valuable for retrieving detail about house and gardens – would not help, and therefore was largely discarded. As a result, only fleeting impressions of Castle Caldwell in its heyday can be gained. The impediments are increased by the changes wrought by Sir James Caldwell’s heir, Sir John Caldwell, who inherited in 1784. The younger Caldwell, aware of his father’s foibles, had, during the lifetime of Sir James, occasionally chided him but more often deferred to his fancies. Once in possession of Castle Caldwell, Sir John imprinted the place with his own stamp of toy-fort gothick. This decorative icing shows clearly in the late nineteenth-century photographs of the house.⁷⁰ On the ground, solid foundations remind in outline of what James and Elizabeth Caldwell engineered and presided over. What filled the house – the fabrics and furnishing approved and sometimes ordered by Lady Arbella Denny, the silver, the portraits, the musical instruments and scores, the books – have either perished or, dispersed long since, are unrecognised as once having graced this odd Germanic court beside Lough Erne.

ENDNOTES

The following abbreviation is used:

JRL John Rylands Library, University of Manchester

- ¹ Two exemplary works set out the essentials about the Caldwells: M. Busteed, *Castle Caldwell, County Fermanagh: life on a west Ulster estate, 1750-1800* (Dublin 2006); J.B. Cunningham, *A History of Castle Caldwell and its Families* (Monaghan [1980]). W.H.G. Bagshawe, *The Bagshawes of Ford: a biographical pedigree* (London 1886) also remains valuable.
- ² T. Barnard, *A New Anatomy of Ireland: the Irish Protestants, 1649-1700* (New Haven and London 2003) 31; Busteed, *Castle Caldwell*, 31.
- ³ G.D. Burtchaell and T.U. Sadleir, *Alumni Dublinenses*, 2nd edn (Dublin 1935) 127, states that he was seventeen when he entered Trinity College, Dublin, in 1737.
- ⁴ T. Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure: lives and possessions in Ireland, 1641-1770* (London and New Haven 2004) 310-44; J. Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800* (New Haven and London 1997) 196-99, 593-94, 750.
- ⁵ R.E. Ward (ed.), *Prince of Dublin Printers: the letters of George Faulkner* (Lexington 1972) 50.
- ⁶ JRL, B 3/29/2, Sir James Caldwell to Lady Caldwell, 1st February 1757.
- ⁷ JRL, 3/13/4, Anne, Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 4th November 1749; 3/14/141, Frederick Trench to same, 2nd September 1752; B 3/30/47, Lady Mary Coghill to Lady Caldwell, 7th April [1756?].
- ⁸ Christ Church, Oxford, Wake MS 14/191, Bishop W. Nicolson to Archbishop W. Wake, 10th April 1724; J. Nichols (ed.), *Letters on various subjects ... to and from William Nicolson, D.D.*, 2 vols (London 1809) II, 599, 607.
- ⁹ Christ Church, Oxford, Wake MS 14/105, Bishop J. Hort to Archbishop W. Wake, 19th October 1723.
- ¹⁰ A.F. Hort, 'The Horts of Hortland', *Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society*, VII, 1912-14, 208-11.
- ¹¹ Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), D 1634/1, item 6, will of Archbishop Josiah Hort, 15th May 1751; JRL, B 3/20/407, draft of Sir J. Caldwell to unknown [1755].
- ¹² PRONI, D 1634/1, item 6.
- ¹³ JRL, B 3/30/74, Bishop A. Smyth to Lady Arbella Denny, 21st April 1759.
- ¹⁴ JRL, B 3/29/58, Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 2nd February 1773; B 3/29/59, Sir J. Caldwell to Lady Caldwell, 6th February 1773.
- ¹⁵ JRL, B 3/30/8, Lady Elizabeth Aylmer to Lady Caldwell, 8th May 1773; B 3/20/345-347, F. Sandys to Sir J. Caldwell, 10th April 1775, 13th December 1781, 4th June 1783; Irish Architectural Archive, *Biographical Index of Irish Architects, s.v.* Sandys, Francis. I am grateful to Ann Martha Rowan and Eddie McParland for the last reference.
- ¹⁶ JRL, B 3/24/52, Calculations about letting house in Dawson Street, Dublin; B 3/21/3, inventory of leases and other legal documents at Castle Caldwell.
- ¹⁷ JRL B 3/30/7-9, Lady Elizabeth Aylmer to Lady Caldwell, Dublin, 8th May 1773, 8th October 1773.
- ¹⁸ JRL, B 3/30/145, Lady Shelburne to Elizabeth Hort, 14th July 1752. See A. Crookshank and D. Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin, *The Painters of Ireland, c.1660-1920* (London 1978) 86; A.

- Crookshank and D. Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin, *Ireland's Painters, 1600-1940* (New Haven and London 2002) 99-101; W.G. Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists*, 2 vols (Dublin 1913) I, 515-23.
- ¹⁹ JRL, B 3/32/3 and 4, William Brennan to Lady Caldwell, 4th September 1756, 31st October 1756; B 3/20/260, 262, 263, 264, 267, 268, 270, James Maguire to Sir J. Caldwell, 20th October 1753, 20th August 1756, 3rd and 10th September 1756, 1st, 7th and 15th October 1756; B 3/32/43, Edward O'Neill to Lady Caldwell, 13th October 1756.
- ²⁰ PRONI, D 1634/2/22, J. Hort to Lady Caldwell, 17th August 1758.
- ²¹ JRL, B 3/27/7, items 6, 7, 11, 26, 42, folio paper book in which are listed leases, letters and other papers.
- ²² JRL, B 3/27/7, items 9, 12, 24, 35, 37.
- ²³ JRL, B 3/27/7, items 9, 24.
- ²⁴ Brian Wragg, *The Life and Works of John Carr of York* (York 2000) 103-04.
- ²⁵ JRL, B 3/29/20, Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, undated [1763].
- ²⁶ JRL, B 3/24/13, agreement of Whitmore Davis and Sir J. Caldwell, 3rd August 1762. No Davis is recorded in T. McMahon and B. O'Neill, 'The Ker estate, Newbliss, Co. Monaghan, 1790-c.1830', *Clogher Record*, XII, 1985, 110-26.
- ²⁷ JRL, B 3/20/77, Whitmore Davis to Sir J. Caldwell, 26th May 1762.
- ²⁸ JRL, B 3/24/17 and 18, Whitmore Davis to Sir J. Caldwell, 24th November 1762, 12th June 1763; B 3/32/6, same to Lady Caldwell, 4th December 1762.
- ²⁹ JRL, B 3/32/7, Whitmore Davis to Lady Caldwell, 17th December 1762.
- ³⁰ JRL, B 3/20/77, Whitmore Davis to Sir J. Caldwell, 26th May 1762.
- ³¹ JRL, B 3/24/17, Sir J. Caldwell agreement with Whitmore Davis, 24th November 1762.
- ³² JRL, B 3/24/13, 17, 20-3, agreements with and proposals of Whitmore Davis, 3rd August 1762, 24th November 1762, 12th June 1763, 11th and 26th July 1763, and undated.
- ³³ JRL, B 3/24/16, proposals by Robert Wallace and William Moore, 24th May 1763.
- ³⁴ JRL, B 3/29/19, Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 12th July 1763.
- ³⁵ JRL, B 3/24/15, draft articles of agreement between Sir J. Caldwell and Patrick Gernon, undated [1762?]; B 3/24/8, estimate of carpenter's work done by P. Gernon for Sir J. Caldwell, 27th March 1762.
- ³⁶ JRL, B 3/29/20, Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, undated [1764?]; B 3/24/26, agreement of Christopher West with Sir J. Caldwell, 27th March 1764.
- ³⁷ JRL, B 3/16/2 and 3, Revd John Alcock to Sir J. Caldwell, 5th and 14th June 1776; B 3/20/5, same to same, 12th July 1776; B 3/32/40, James Maguire to Lady Caldwell, 15th March 1757; B 3/16/261, Alexander Montgomery to Sir J. Caldwell, 26th August 1781; B 3/27/11/27, articles with H. Ward and P. Dolan; B 3/24/28, articles of Sir J. Caldwell with B. Ward, H. Ward and P. Dolan, 25th April 1768.
- ³⁸ JRL, B 3/17/54, Bishop H. Maxwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 2nd May 1776; A. Rowan, *North-West Ulster* (Harmondsworth 1979)143.
- ³⁹ JRL, B 3/27/7, pp.1-2, items 14/6, Boggs' estimate for tenements in Belturbet; B 3/16/96, J. Fortescue to Sir J. Caldwell, 7th April 1769; B 3/20/367, R. Stanford to same, 8th September 1768.
- ⁴⁰ JRL, B 3/17/53-55, Bishop H. Maxwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 21st April 1776, 2nd and 18th May 1776.
- ⁴¹ JRL, B 3/17/55, Bishop H. Maxwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 18th May 1776; B 3/17/57, Bishop W.

- Newcome to same, 10th February 1774.
- ⁴² JRL, B 3/30/117, Mary Hort to Lady Caldwell, 19th December 1757.
- ⁴³ Bowood House, Wiltshire, Shelburne Papers, 6/18, Lady Caldwell to Dowager Countess of Shelburne, 20th October 1777.
- ⁴⁴ National Library of Ireland, Talbot-Crosbie MSS, folder 56, Lady A. Denny to Lady A. Crosbie, 9th [Feb?] 1748[9].
- ⁴⁵ For the Bookers, Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure*, 307; D. Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin and J. Peill, *Irish Furniture* (New Haven and London 2007) 83-85, 140-47, 261-62, 291; N.M. Roche, 'Irish eighteenth-century looking glasses: makers, frames and glass' in B. Austen (ed.), *Irish Furniture, The Furniture History Society* (London 2000) 16-23.
- ⁴⁶ JRL, B 3/30/86, 87 and 89, Lady A. Denny to Lady Caldwell, Dublin, 5th July 1769, 28th March 1770, 27th September 1770.
- ⁴⁷ JRL, B 3/30/88, Lady A. Denny to Lady Caldwell, 4th May 1770. For the availability and choices of wallpaper, see Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure*, 92-94; D. Skinner, 'Flocks, flowers and follies: some recently discovered Irish wallpapers of the eighteenth century', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, VI, 2003, 11-19; D. Skinner, 'Irish period wallpapers', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 13, 1997, 52-61.
- ⁴⁸ JRL, B 3/30/86, Lady A. Denny to Lady Caldwell, 5th July 1769.
- ⁴⁹ JRL, B 3/30/72 and 73, Lady A. Denny to Lady Caldwell, 25th November 1758, 27th January 1759.
- ⁵⁰ JRL, B3/28/22, bill of G. Faulkner, 1759-61; B 3/28/31, bill of Francis and John Booker, 17th September 1771; B 3/28/37, bill of T. Read, 3rd August 1776.
- ⁵¹ JRL, B 3/29/32, Sir J. Caldwell to Lady Caldwell, 18th October 1772. On Trotter, see Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure*, 155; Crookshank and Glin, *Ireland's Painters*, 98-99; Crookshank and Glin, *The Painters of Ireland*, 86; Strickland, *Dictionary*, II, 459-60.
- ⁵² JRL, B 3/28/21, Sir J. Caldwell, account with Thomas Frye, 9th October 1760; D. Alexander, 'The Dublin group: Irish mezzotint engravers in London, 1750-1775', *Quarterly Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, XVI, 1973, 73-87; T. Clayton, *The English Print, 1688-1802* (New Haven and London 1997) 200-01; Crookshank and Glin, *Ireland's Painters*, 49-50; Strickland, *Dictionary*, I, 385-90.
- ⁵³ JRL, B 3/29/109, J. Caldwell to Lady Caldwell, 8th June 1773; B 3/10, letter 509, Owen Wynne to Sir J. Caldwell, 22nd October 1777; B 3/14/156, same to same, undated [September or October 1777]; B 3/30/153, Mrs Wynne to Lady Caldwell, 30th September 1777; B 3/13/97, Lady A. Denny to Arbella Caldwell, 8th November 1783; B.B. Butler, 'Lady Arbella Denny, 1707-1792', *Dublin Historical Record*, IX, 1946-47, 19.
- ⁵⁴ JRL B 3/13/97, Lady A. Denny to Arbella Caldwell, 8th November 1783.
- ⁵⁵ JRL, B 3/29/69, postscript of A. Caldwell in Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, Dublin, 24th March 1778.
- ⁵⁶ JRL, B 3/29/73, Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 2nd April 1778.
- ⁵⁷ JRL, B 3/10, letters 486, 493, A. Young to Sir J. Caldwell, 28th January 1777, 5th June 1777; A. Young, *A Tour in Ireland*, 2 vols (Dublin 1780) I, 263-68.
- ⁵⁸ T. Barnard, 'The cultures of eighteenth-century Irish towns' in P. Borsary and L. Proudfoot (eds), *Provincial Towns in Early Modern Britain and Ireland: change, convergence and divergence*, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 108, 2002, 195-222.
- ⁵⁹ Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure*, 359.

- ⁶⁰ JRL, B 3/16/43, R. Charleton to Sir J. Caldwell, 16th September 1774; B 3/16/137, J. Hawkesworth to same, 21st December 1770; B 3/16/303, G. Riddlesdale to same, 17th September 1774; B 3/16/320, R. Simpson to same, 2nd September 1776; B 3/16/381, B. Victory to same, 24th February 1773; B 3/16/382, Sir J. Caldwell to unknown, 13th April 1773; B 3/10, letter 402, Bishop F. Hervey to Sir J. Caldwell, 12th February 1775; B 3/20/259, H. Maguire to same, undated [October 1776]; B 3/27/7, pp 67, 68, lists of Sir J. Caldwell's music and musical instruments; B 3/28/4, lists of music and instruments, 29th October 1774.
- ⁶¹ JRL, B 3/29/55, Sir J. Caldwell to Lady Caldwell, 8th or 18th or 28th January 1773.
- ⁶² JRL, B 3/10, letter 509, O. Wynne to Sir J. Caldwell, 22nd October 1777.
- ⁶³ JRL, B 3/16/114, David Garrick to Sir J. Caldwell, 14th May 1776; B 3/16/115, Sir J. Caldwell to D. Garrick, 3rd June 1776. The second letter is printed in *Notes and Queries*, 8th series, I, 1892, 1-3. It includes an uncollected verse by Jonathan Swift.
- ⁶⁴ JRL, B 3/29/30, 32 and 34, Sir J. Caldwell to Lady Caldwell, 4th and 18th October 1772, 3rd November 1772. Substantial extracts from these letters are printed in Bagshawe, *The Bagshawes of Ford*, 323-35.
- ⁶⁵ JRL, B 3/27/7, no 1, folio paper book of leases, letters and other papers; B 3/29/21 and 22, Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 5th and 6th April 1764; B 3/29/27, Sir J. Caldwell to Lady Caldwell, 28th September 1772; cf. Ward (ed.), *Prince of Dublin Printers*, 71-72.
- ⁶⁶ For Ravensdale, see Young, *Tour*, I, 154.
- ⁶⁷ JRL, B 3/29/38, 39, 57, 58, 61, Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 13th and 15th November 1772, 2nd and 10th February 1773, undated [1773].
- ⁶⁸ JRL, B 3/29/61, 64 and 68, Lady Caldwell to Sir J. Caldwell, 10th and 23rd February 1778, 17th March 1778.
- ⁶⁹ JRL, B 3/14/129, Sir J. Caldwell to Dowager Countess of Shelburne, 23rd February 1779.
- ⁷⁰ Cunningham, *Castle Caldwell and its Families*, 146, 148.