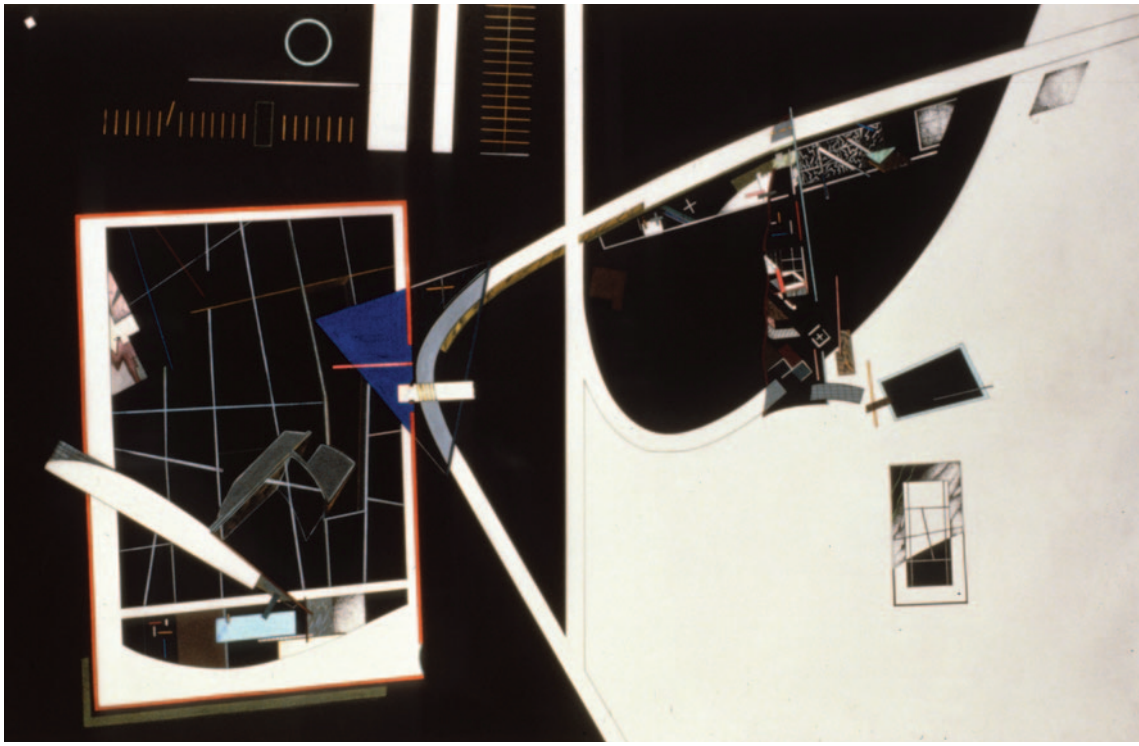
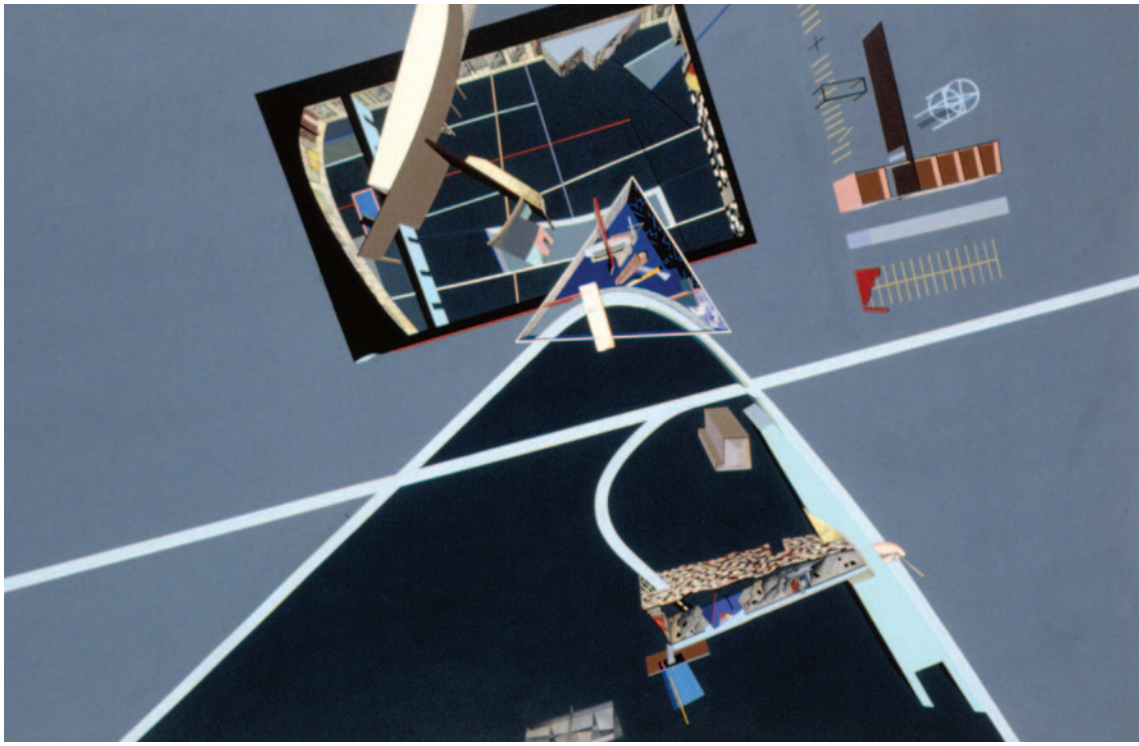




Áras an Taoisigh?: a prime minister's residence in Dublin, 1922-2009

CONOR MORRISSEY

On 2nd April 2008, after almost eleven years in office, Bertie Ahern announced his resignation as Taoiseach (prime minister) of Ireland following controversy concerning his personal finances. Ahern's combative, avuncular successor, Brian Cowen, came to power amidst an air of optimism. However, one initial question put to Cowen by journalists left him flummoxed. Did the incoming Taoiseach intend to use the recently refurbished Steward's Lodge near the Phoenix Park as his official residence? Cowen, unsure how to respond, could merely quip, 'I don't know. Is it available?'[1]

It was a reasonable answer. By 2008 Ireland was in the strange situation of having recently, and expensively, refurbished a house which resembled a prime minister's residence but which the previous incumbent refused to move into and which no-one was willing to officially designate as such. Ireland is highly unusual in not providing its prime minister with an official residence. In almost every country in the world such accommodation is regarded as part of the basic infrastructure of government – a secure residence in which to live with one's family, receive guests, and conduct affairs of state. The choice of residence can make a statement about the role the head of government plays in national life. The British prime minister traditionally resides in a flat above 10 Downing Street, a large but unpretentious Georgian terraced house, which sits in contrast to the grandeur of the nearby Buckingham Palace and Palace of Westminster.[2] The French prime minister resides in splendour at the Hôtel de Matignon, once the home of Talleyrand. The German chancellor usually maintains an apartment on the top floor of Axel Schultes's and Charlotte Frank's enormous Federal Chancellery building in Berlin, proximate to the Reichstag.[3] Even the prime minister of the tiny Republic of Malta has the choice of two – the Villa Francia and the Girgenti Palace, the latter a summer residence. Why has Ireland no prime minister's residence?

In December 1922, T.M. Healy, the first governor-general of the Irish Free State,

1, 2 – Zaha Hadid, Taoiseach's House and State Guest House competition, 1979
(courtesy of the Zaha Hadid Foundation)

took up residence in the Viceregal Lodge in the Phoenix Park, formerly the home of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (Plate 3).[4] Despite some public and much opposition criticism, Healy and his successor, James McNeill, kept court in the Phoenix Park. There would have been a neat historical symmetry in setting aside the nearby Chief Secretary's Lodge, formerly used to accommodate the minister with responsibility for governing Ireland, as the official residence of the President of the Executive Council.[5] However, President Cosgrave, anxious to avoid accusations of extravagance or even of aping English customs, fiercely resisted this proposal.[6] Instead, in 1927, the Chief Secretary's Lodge was leased to the United States government. Renamed Deerfield, it serves as the residence of the US ambassador to Ireland.[7] In 1925, in the first of several private initiatives, Sir Charles Barrington, Bt., offered to gift Glenstal Castle, county Limerick, as an official residence for the President of the Executive Council. This too was declined.[8] In 1929 the Under Secretary's Lodge, the third official residence in the Phoenix Park, which had also attracted rumours that it would be set aside for the same purpose, was leased to the Holy See as an apostolic nunciature (Plate 4). However, a sense that the Phoenix Park was the appropriate site would endure, and as we will see, a later government would return to the nunciature when it sought to build a Taoiseach's residence.

Éamon de Valera, who replaced Cosgrave in 1932, was likewise disinclined to attract public criticism by dignifying his position with an official residence. De Valera's primary goal on taking office was to abolish the elements of the Anglo-Irish Treaty that impeded Irish independence. As such, the governor-generalship, and its residence, became a target of the new administration. In October 1932, having been humiliated on several occasions by government ministers, James McNeill resigned as governor-general.[9] De Valera replaced him with Domhnall Ó Buachalla, a former TD and an undistinguished figure, as part of a policy of running down the office as a prelude to its abolition. Ó Buachalla performed scarcely any duties and did not take up residence in the Phoenix Park, with its undesirable colonial overtones; instead a substantial villa was rented for his use in Monkstown, south county Dublin.[10] The office was eventually abolished in 1936. The following year de Valera introduced a new constitution, Bunreacht na hÉireann, which replaced the governor-generalship with the position of President of Ireland. The constitution stated that the president 'shall have an official residence in or near the city of Dublin'.[11] The old Viceregal Lodge in the Phoenix Park was the natural choice. In June 1938, Douglas Hyde, the first incumbent, took up residence in the renamed Áras an

4 – 'Residence of the Under-Secretary for Ireland in the Phoenix Park'
(Illustrated London News, 13th May 1882)

opposite

3 – George Petrie (1790-1866), 'The Vice-Regal Lodge, Phoenix Park, near Dublin'
(G.N. Wright, Ireland Illustrated, 1828-39)

Uachtaráin (residence of the President). 'The Áras' has come to symbolise what has been a generally distinguished office. There was no provision in the new constitution for an official residence for the Taoiseach, as the position of President of the Executive Council was renamed. However, there had been some speculation in 1936 that St. Anne's, Clontarf, an enormous Italianate mansion on the north shore of Dublin Bay, might have been acquired for such a purpose.[12] In fact, de Valera, who cultivated an austere public image (and who lived in some comfort at his family home on Cross Avenue, Blackrock), had no intention of drawing accusations of extravagance. Little would be heard of a Taoiseach's residence in Dublin for over thirty-five years.

By the mid-1960s, Ireland's enhanced international obligations would demonstrate that Dublin lacked the rudimentary infrastructure in which to conduct diplomacy. Taoiseach Seán Lemass's historic meeting with his Northern Ireland counterpart, the signing of the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement, and Ireland's application for European Economic Community (EEC) membership, signalled that the country's years of international obscurity were drawing to a close. The outbreak of the Northern Ireland Troubles in 1969 required Irish politicians and diplomats to engage in bilateral talks with Britain, with concomitant security concerns. It was in this context that official, if not perhaps public, support grew for an official residence.

On 14th April 1973, Lord Talbot de Malahide, the owner of Malahide Castle and demesne in north county Dublin, died unexpectedly while on a cruise in Greece. At the time of his death, de Malahide, a career diplomat, was engaged in discussions about gifting his property, one of the most imposing and extensive estates on the east coast, for use as an official residence for the Taoiseach. However, he died before any agreement had been reached. In 1975 the castle was sold to Dublin County Council while many of the contents were dispersed, and it was developed as a tourist attraction and public park.[13]

A proposal to build a Taoiseach's residence in Dublin would always prove controversial and leave the government open to the charge of extravagance while ordinary people struggled. Mindful of this, it was Jack Lynch, leader of the opposition Fianna Fáil, who launched a concerted effort which he hoped could gain cross-party support and convince a sceptical public. Lynch had previously served as Taoiseach from 1966 to 1973. In June 1973, four months after his party had lost power, Lynch used the parliamentary debate on the estimate for public works to, 'in his own quite nice diffident way, give us something of the troubles of being a Taoiseach without an official residence'.[14]

> I would say we are probably one of the few countries in Europe that has not got an official residence for the Taoiseach ... I naturally did not raise it while I was still Taoiseach because it is difficult for the occupant of that office to raise such a question ... one has to have had experience of the office and also a disinterest in the office or in the residence in so far as one can have it.[15]

In a detailed rationale, Lynch addressed security concerns, telling the House that during his period as Taoiseach his family home (in Garville Avenue, Rathgar) had been the scene of repeated demonstrations by members of the Dublin Housing Action Committee, which, he stressed, could prove dangerous and was highly inconvenient for neighbours.[16] Every Taoiseach since the foundation of the State, he stated, had been resident in Dublin. However, in the event that a future leader lived outside the capital, the government would be placed in a difficult position. Lynch also argued that in light of Ireland's EEC membership and the situation in Northern Ireland, foreign dignitaries would be better received at an official residence than at Iveagh House (the Department of Foreign Affairs) or Government Buildings. Lynch even highlighted the difficulties experienced by prime ministerial spouses:

> There are difficulties also in respect of the wife of a Taoiseach on whom many duties devolve. If she has a young family she will have many family chores to attend to but in her role as wife of the Taoiseach she must fulfil many other duties by way of entertainment et cetera. I am not making any complaints in this respect but there is the added factor that the wife of the Taoiseach receives a great volume of correspondence with which a conscientious wife will endeavour to deal personally. If there was a reasonable official residence with a modest staff, these duties could be attended to more adequately.[17]

Finally, in brave or foolhardy comments, Lynch argued that a country residence should be provided for the President, where he would reside during certain periods of the year, partially in an effort to make the office less Dublin-centric.[18] Although there were a few snipes at the suggestion that the President should be afforded a country residence along the lines of Chequers, the government was guardedly supportive of the Taoiseach's residence plan and made no effort to make political capital from Lynch's proposals. The press was also encouraging, and there was a sense that Lynch had argued a difficult case well. An *Irish Times* editorial, which highlighted the growing number of EEC and Northern Ireland-related guests who needed to be received and entertained, stated:

> The Taoiseach is entitled not only to the rate for the job but to the appropriate tools and accommodation for it too. There would be no need for extravagance. But a place for a Taoiseach, qua Taoiseach, to call his own – and the nation's – would seem a good idea now.[19]

However, Liam Cosgrave's Fine Gael/Labour coalition, which, from October 1973 was dealing with the oil crisis, showed no interest in taking on the project. In 1974, for example, economic crisis forced the government to abandon long-gestating plans to build a John F. Kennedy memorial concert hall in Dublin. Lynch, however, was undeterred, and

he and his spokesmen continued to advocate in the Dáil for a Taoiseach's residence.

In June 1977, Jack Lynch, having won a landslide on the basis of a notorious give-away manifesto, returned to power. The way was clear to implement his proposal. Speculation was initially attached to Barretstown Castle, in Ballymore Eustace, county Kildare, which had been presented to the State by Garfield Weston, the Canadian business tycoon, in 1977. However, government sources stated that Barretstown, a two-storey Gothic Victorian mansion built around a medieval towerhouse, was too far from Dublin to be suitable.[21] Instead, Lynch's attention turned to a central location, and one which had long been associated with the provision of accommodation for senior officials.

In July 1977, just one month after the election, the government decided to erect an official residence for the Taoiseach, as well as a state guest house to accommodate visiting heads of state and government in Dublin. An interdepartmental committee consisting of representatives of the departments of the Taoiseach, Environment, Finance, Foreign Affairs and the Office of Public Works (OPW) was set up to drive through the initiative, chaired by Richard Stokes, the deputy assistant secretary at the Department of the Taoiseach. Consensus was reached that the former Under Secretary's Lodge in the Phoenix Park, which had been leased to the Holy See since 1929, was the appropriate site for the complex. Conveniently for the government, the Church wished to vacate the property – which was expensive to maintain and had been undermined by dry rot – and move to a purpose-built nunciature on the Navan Road in Dublin.[24]

The Italianate-style house was built in about 1760, with later additions by Jacob Owen (1778-1870). The structure incorporated the remains of a small medieval tower-house, believed to date from about 1600. A *c*.1840 garden attributed to Ninian Nivan (d.1879) has received little critical attention, and would scarcely feature in the designs submitted to the architectural competition (discussed below).[25] Initial plans called for the demolition of the entire building, which was judged to be of little architectural merit and was in poor structural condition.[26] The site was certainly appealing. Attractively situated in the Park, facing the Dublin mountains, yet convenient to the city centre, it was also less than a mile from Áras an Uachtaráin, which would facilitate a common pool of security arrangements. The government's vision was grand in scale – the Taoiseach's residence and state guest house as two separate buildings, perhaps linked by kitchen facilities. The proposed residence contained a self-contained apartment for the Taoiseach and his family, as well as a dining room for up to thirty guests, and a reception area for up to sixty. The Taoiseach's apartment included a living room, dining room, secretary's office, 'music/hobby room', six bedrooms, a kitchen and a tennis court. The inclusion of a state guest house in the proposals was borne of official embarrassment at the practice of putting up overseas dignitaries in city centre hotels. The guest house included two principal suites of rooms, suitable for royalty and heads of state, twelve further visitor's bedrooms, as well as a range of further offices and other facilities including staff bedrooms and a helicopter pad.[27] Overall, officials stated that 'A certain prestige should be aimed at, with an avoidance of ostentation.'[28]

With a suitable site, co-operative civil service, silent opposition, and largely supportive press, it seemed little could derail Lynch's project. However, fate would intervene when, to the consternation of officials, it turned out that a substantial section of the nun-

ciature was far older than had been anticipated. An extensive examination of the property found that considerably more of the medieval towerhouse remained intact, embedded within the building. Although overhanging parapets had been removed, the windows had been widened and finished in Victorian style, doorways had been enlarged, floors had been reconstructed, and the whole had been plastered internally and externally, OPW experts found that enough of the original medieval structure remained intact to require protection under the National Monuments Act, 1930.[29] The 'discovery' of the Ashtown Tower was viewed in a wholly negative light, with members of the interdepartmental committee describing it as a 'new and alarming development, and one which could have vast implications in terms of cost and time for this project'.[30]

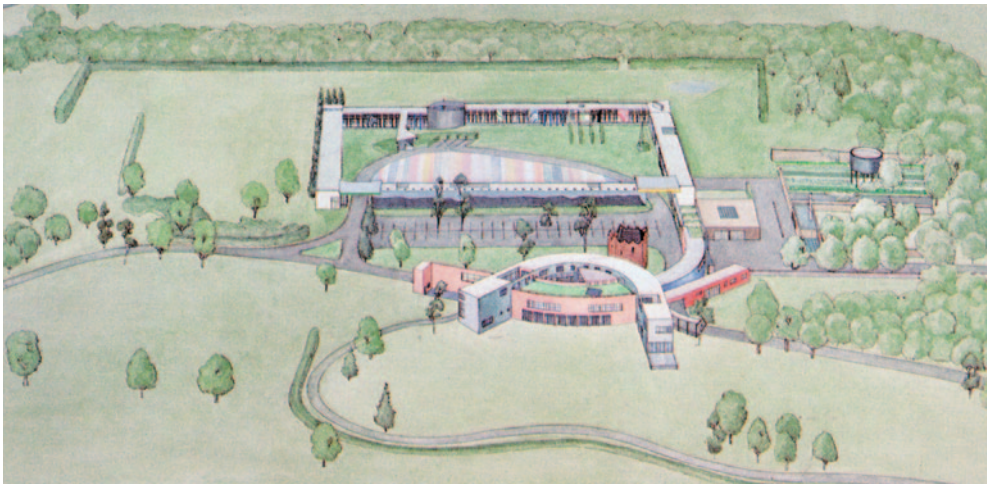
Erika Hanna has shown how the replacement of old buildings by modern structures during the 1960s was initially welcomed, but that before the end of the decade a coalition of preservationists, architects, students and others emerged to oppose these changes and demand the conservation of the old city fabric.[31] The Wood Quay débacle loomed large in the calculations of civil servants, who invited a number of preservationist bodies to inspect the Phoenix Park site. To the dismay of officials, the activists, who included Maurice Craig (1919-2011), the architectural historian and the leading preservationist in Dublin, demanded the retention not just of Ashtown Tower, but the remainder of the house as well.[32] In a letter to the secretary of the Department of the Taoiseach, the head of the OPW warned of the potential of a protest on Wood Quay lines, and stated that he wished to avoid the 'embarrassment it might cause the Taoiseach if plans for his official residence were to be caught up in a hostile campaign'.[33] Ultimately, under civil service advice, Jack Lynch agreed on a middle course: the medieval castle would be retained, and they would leave the planned architectural competition to decide on the practicality of incorporating the eighteenth-century house into the new buildings.[34]

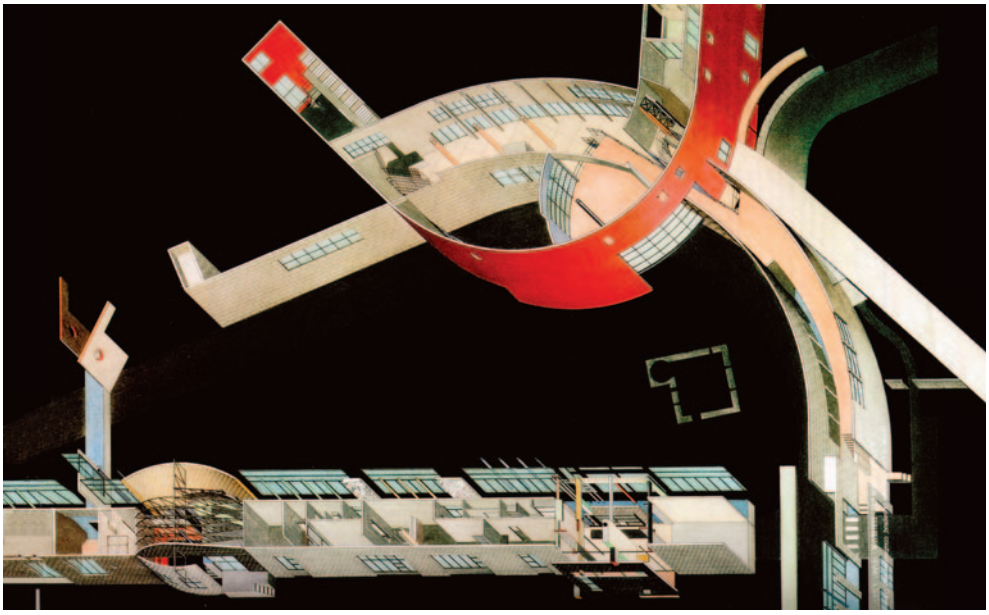
Although there is little evidence that Jack Lynch played much part in devising the detail of the scheme, he proved a notably impatient client. In a letter to J. McCarthy of the OPW, Lynch stated that he was 'very disappointed' with the lack of progress on the project, and sought the appointment of further staff to ensure speedy delivery.[35] In his reply, McCarthy cited two reasons for the delay: first, the uncovering of Ashtown Tower, and secondly, controversy over the nationality of the designer of the project.[36] Lynch, from the outset, had insisted that the competition to design the buildings should be confined to Irish architects. However, on receiving advice that such a policy would contravene EEC regulations, it was grudgingly agreed to hold an international competition.[37]

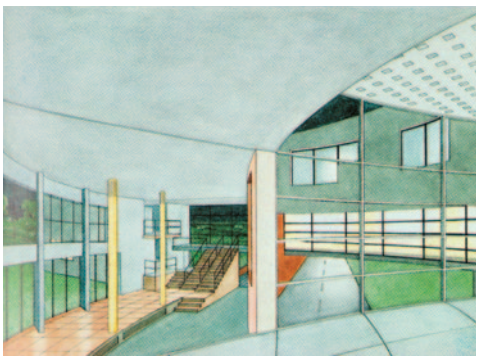
Lynch's decision to build an official residence and state guest house in the Phoenix Park was generally supported by the press.[38] However, no-one thought to poll the public on the matter, and the considerable number of outraged letters to the editor or to the Taoiseach suggests there was a substantial constituency who opposed the proposal.[39]

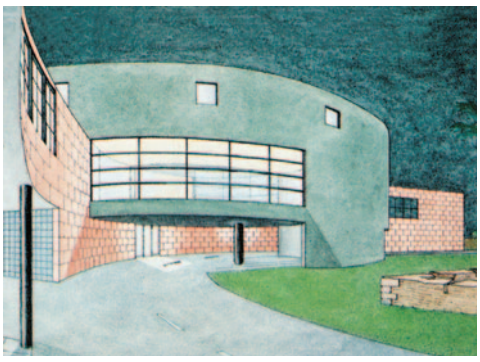
In early April 1979, an international architectural competition was announced to design an official residence for the Taoiseach and a state guest house on the nunciature site in the Phoenix Park. The press, eager to hear the result of the contest, could not resist speculating on the cost of the project. The *Evening Herald* had enormous fun, alleging

5-8 – Rem Koolhaas, Taoiseach's House and State Guest House competition, 1979 (courtesy OMA)









that Jack Lynch's 'Wonderland' would cost £7 million, or even £10 million pounds.[40]

There were five voting members of the panel of assessors – Richard Stokes, Aldo van Eyck, William A. Maguire, Maurice Hogan and Martin D. Burke. Stokes, as the civil servant who had taken the lead in planning the project, was a natural choice to chair the committee. The Dutch architect and theorist Aldo van Eyck (1918-1999), although responsible for comparatively few buildings, such as the Municipal Orphanage in Amsterdam (1955-60) and the Roman Catholic Church in The Hague (1964-69), had a profound impact on the second generation of modern architects. He was a leading proponent of the structuralist movement, which turned away from CIAM-inspired functionalism towards a more humane architecture, grounded in its natural context. William A. Maguire FRIAI (1924-2007), who trained in UCD, where he taught, was a former president of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI). Maurice Hogan MRIAI, a former honorary secretary and vice-president of the Institute, had worked on Alexandra College, Dublin, for Scott Tallon Walker (1972). Martin D. Burke was Principal Architect at the OPW.

The competition excited major national and international interest, and a total of 98 entries were received.[41] International entrants included David Chipperfield, Rem Koolhaas (Plates 5-8), Edward Jones, Bolles + Wilson, Benson + Forsyth, and Zaha Hadid. Irish entrants included Arthur Gibney, de Blacam and Meagher, Sam Stephenson, and Moore, Meagher, Farrell & Cleary from the UCD School of Architecture.

There were several noteworthy entries. Perhaps the most visually striking was that of Zaha Hadid (1950-2016). Although submitted under the name of Elia Zenghelis, her tutor at the AA in London, the entry was entirely Hadid's own work, and was her first major project.[42] Hadid conceived two separate entities, the Taoiseach's residence and state guest house, each with their own sense of independence, connected by covered walkways (Plates 1, 2). Throughout her career Hadid would find fame for her curved, futuristic designs; such a tendency was evident here, a gravity-defying, dynamic structure, which made no concession to Irish architectural heritage. Hadid's entry did not find favour with the panel of assessors, who passed over it without comment.

An entirely different approach was taken by Julyan Wickham and Desmond

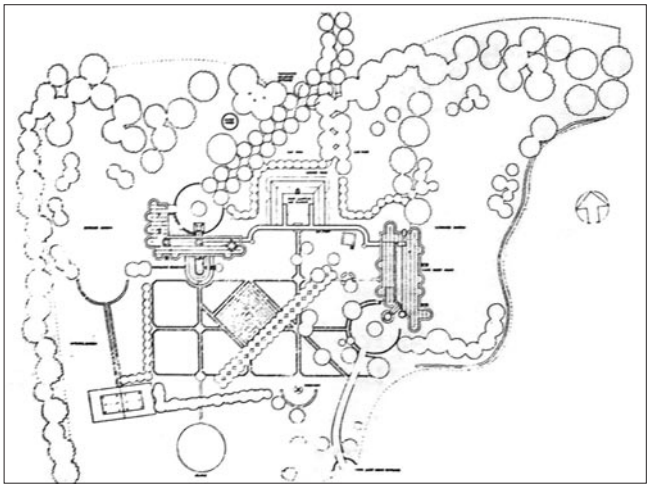
Taoiseach's House and State Guest House competition, 1979

10 – Wickham & Lavery, site plan

opposite

9 – Paul Shepheard, view of residence from the south-west

(all drawings courtesy of the architects)



Lavery, who were awarded joint second place. Drawing on Ireland's country house tradition, Wickham & Lavery's design sought to maintain a visual unity between both elements of the design, chiefly by means of a two-story walkway and consistency of detail throughout (Plate 10). The centrepiece was a bay front, which, in the designers' words, would 'provide the maximum prospect of park and sky'.[43] This, of all the designs whose plans have survived, showed the most awareness of the 'Big House' inheritance, of a building defined by its proximity to Áras an Uachtaráin and Deerfield: 'The tradition of the Irish house floating in a sea of grass is maintained.'[44]

Paul Shepheard, a London-based architect and noted architectural writer, designed a presidential-style palace – a large central block of reception rooms and offices, with two wings, the east to house the state guest house, and the west for the residence (Plate 9). In a witty commentary that declined to take itself seriously, Shepheard envisaged a building 'set up by a parade ground rolled in Breedon gravel for the sound of crunching boots and the scars of tracked vehicles when the final moment comes'. As with other entries, finding a means of uniting the two elements was a challenge. His solution was idiosyncratic; he promised, 'with twenty five grand allowed in the estimate for them', a bas relief screen of 'the Irish Republic's ups and downs to join the parts and hide the oil truck' [*sic*].[45]

Aldo van Eyck revealed frustration at a younger generation of architects who were more concerned with demonstrating an avant-garde sensibility rather than undertaking to build a complex that met the requirements of the competition.[46] He stated,

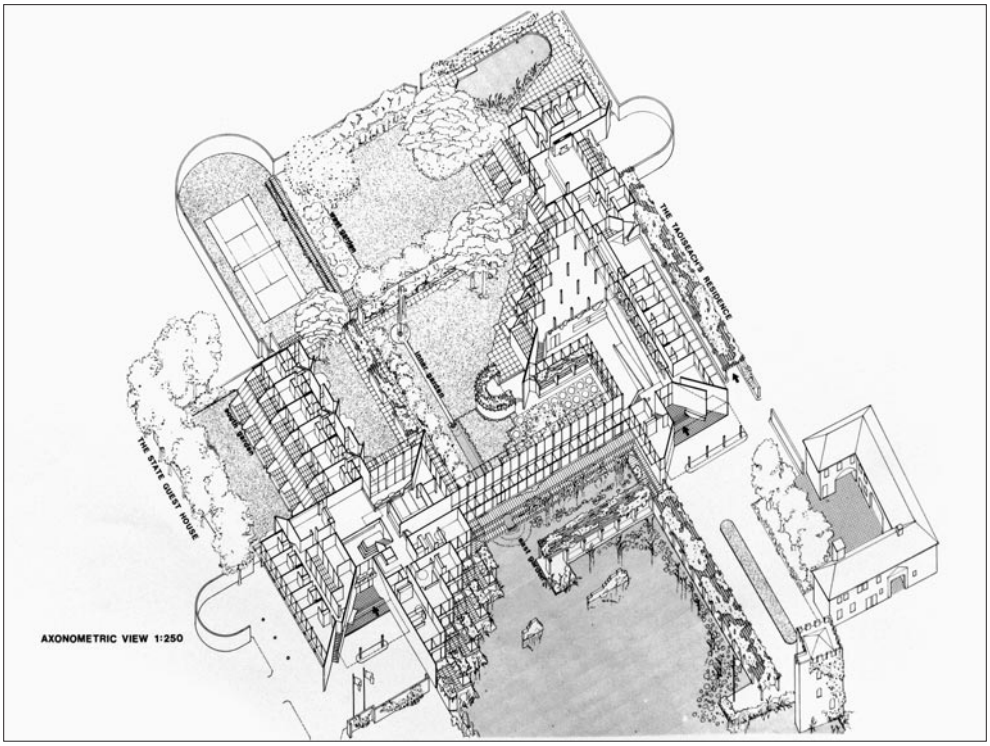
> This autumn in Baile Átha Cliath [Dublin], I noticed, perhaps for the first time, how, in the hands of architects, even perversity can become distasteful. Just a handful of architects played the game instead of playing the fool and came forward with ideas that are workable and not more or less absurd. A large part of the rest seems hardly concerned with anything as tangibly real as a building – its use and usefulness. Instead just ideas about ideas about ideas ... Yes, about what? Architecture? Goodness Gracious – Muddled ideas about misunderstood ideas, wilfully misplaced.[47]

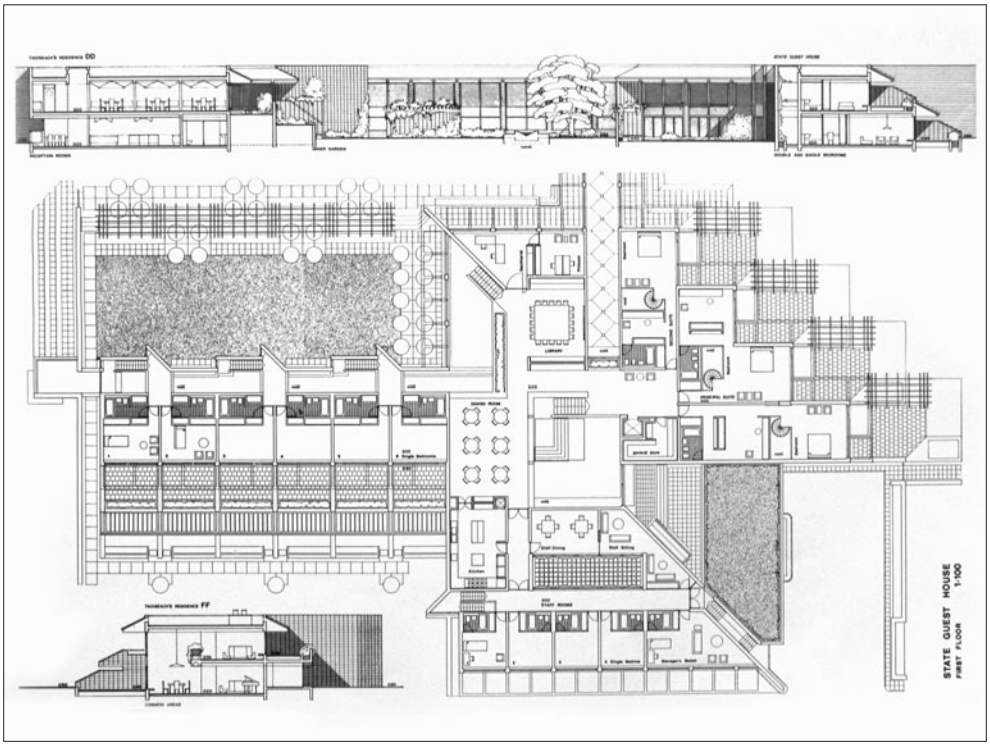
Only two entries impressed van Eyck – Wickham & Lavery's, and that of Eldred Evans. Evans, of Evans & Shalev Architects, a London-based practice, won the £6,000 prize for a project with an estimated cost of £3.9 million.[48] That van Eyck championed Eldred Evans' entry should come as no surprise. In conversation with this author, Evans stressed the influence of the Dutch architect in her work. Indeed, the decentralised nature of the Taoiseach's residence design is reminiscent of van Eyck's Municipal Orphanage. Jack Lynch's famously modest character also influenced the design: in obvious contrast to other entrants, she interpreted the brief as a house for Lynch, rejecting a formalistic block in favour of a humanistic cluster of buildings.[49]

In contrast to the genre-defying radicalism of Hadid, or the playfulness – or satire – of Shepheard, there was a stately, dignified and serious character to Evans' design. (Plates 11-13). The residence and state guest house, although designed as two distinct buildings, form an integrated cluster, linked by a walkway, which presents itself to visitors as a homogenous entity. Much inspiration was drawn from the surrounding parkland: Evans' architect's report stated: 'The grouping of the buildings and the approaches to them establishes the cluster as the dominant feature of the park and creates a positive relationship with them.'[50] Gardens, of which there are three (east, west, and inner), were central to the design, providing screening and a sense of intimacy. Water is used to good effect, with an artificial lake fed from a fountain in the inner garden by means of a canal. Certain key elements of the existing buildings are incorporated: the tower house is retained and placed to the side of the new structure, and the stables, once refurbished, are given over to guardrooms and gardeners' stores. The entire complex is built within the existing walled gardens, and Evans suggested that local stone be used for cladding. Overall, the intended effect is dignified, even bucolic.[51] The human scale of Evans' structure, and its organic relationship with its surroundings, strongly suggests a structuralist influence. In terms of accommodation, the residence incorporates a private apartment containing a living room, dining room, study and bedrooms, as well as reception space. The guest house, which resembles a small hotel, has twelve guest rooms, with three self-contained primary suites. A range of further facilities, including a library, 'dancing space' and music room were provided. Ever eager to avoid charges of extravagance, government spokesmen stressed that only one-sixth of the total would be set aside for the Taoiseach's personal use.[52]

In late-November 1979, Professor John M. Kelly, TD for Dublin County South, enquired in the Dáil as to the name the official residence should bear. Kelly asked the Taoiseach, 'Can the House be assured that we will not get the usual stodgy, official mythology sort of name for this residence which will be thought up by some official over his lunch hour?' Amidst interruptions, Lynch could merely respond, 'If the Deputy has any suggestions I will have them considered.'[53] Just two weeks later, Jack Lynch, whose position had been undermined by internal party critics, resigned as Taoiseach and leader

11-13 – Eldred Evans, Taoiseach's House and State Guest House competition, 1979
11 – East garden elevation / opposite 12 – Axonometric / 13 – State Guest House, first-floor plan


THE TAOISEACH'S RESIDENCE
THE STATE GUEST HOUSE
AXONOMETRIC VIEW 1:250


STATE GUEST HOUSE
FIRST FLOOR 1:100

of Fianna Fáil, and Charles Haughey won the resulting leadership contest and was elected Taoiseach on 11th December 1979.[54]

Charles Haughey (1925-2006) is the most controversial Taoiseach in the history of the State, and no other Taoiseach has had quite the same appetite for *grands projets*.[55] On 2nd January 1980, the government announced that in light of 'the current economic situation they should not proceed with the building of a Taoiseach's residence and State Guest House in the Phoenix Park'.[56] At a meeting a few days before, Haughey had brusquely discarded the project, and instead ordered that priority should be given to a major expansion and redevelopment of Government Buildings on Merrion Street. He also sought the redevelopment of the nunciature site as a 'civic centre'.[57] In evidence to the Moriarty Tribunal over twenty years later, Haughey explained that his own house, Abbeville, 'would fulfil the terms of whatever ancillary things had to be done as Party Leader, as Taoiseach', and that 'there was no particular need for any new sparkling armoured palace in the Phoenix Park.[58] Haughey hoped, in abandoning the proposal, to gain positive news coverage that would depict him as an assertive leader, willing to slash government waste. This, however, did not transpire, and the new Taoiseach's office complained to RTÉ about its paltry coverage of the story.[59] During Haughey's period in office (1979-81, 1982, 1987-92), Abbeville served as the Taoiseach's official residence in all but name.[60] Almost no mention of a Taoiseach's residence was made during the 1990s save for some speculation regarding the future of Mornington House, which bore a problematic similarity to Downing Street and was ultimately sold to become part of the Merrion Hotel. Government ministers occasionally justified the steadily rising Taoiseach's salary by reference to the lack of official residence.[61]

In June 1999, Edward Guinness, 4th Earl of Iveagh, placed Farmleigh, a seventy-eight-acre estate on the edge of the Phoenix Park, on the market. The government had initially declined the option to purchase the property, the Guinness family's principal Irish residence, a short time before.[62] In so doing, it was acting in line with long-established policy: the Irish government is traditionally extremely reluctant to purchase important estates for the nation. Although few Dubliners were aware of the existence of the secluded property at Farmleigh, public concern was expressed that another historic house would fall into the hands of speculators. Eventually, with opposition parties adding to the pressure, the State announced in late June that it had purchased the house and lands for £23 million.[63] On 28th July 2001, following an extensive refurbishment, Bertie Ahern officially opened the new state guest house at Farmleigh.[64] After almost twenty-five years, part of Jack Lynch's plans had been realised.

Four years later it appeared that the other aspect of Lynch's proposal, an official residence for the Taoiseach, was about to be realised as well. In December 2005 the press reported that the Steward's Lodge on the Farmleigh estate was being refurbished with the aim of providing a residence for the Taoiseach. Government sources stated that Garda Síochána concerns about the difficulties of providing security for private residences, as well as the advantages of the Taoiseach having an officially designated house in which to receive dignitaries, contributed to the decision. However, Ahern would not undermine his carefully cultivated reputation as an ordinary northsider by moving into the Farmleigh estate. A spokeswoman for Ahern stated that the Steward's Lodge 'could be used as a

Taoiseach's residence in the future, but it won't be used by him'.[65] Three years later, Ahern's successor, Brian Cowen, as we saw at the head of this article, seemed unsure if the Steward's Lodge was even at his disposal. Unlike previous Taoisigh, Cowen was not Dublin-based and stated that should the Steward's Lodge be given security clearance, he would 'obviously stay over there and use it accordingly for my requirements'.[66] However, Brian Cowen's position as Taoiseach coincided with the worst financial and banking crisis in the history of the State, and it was in this context that Cowen made the most tentative efforts to reside at Farmleigh.[67]

A prime minister's residence is more than a dignified venue for photo opportunities, an intimate location for negotiations, and a home for the head of government and their family. A residence is a potent indicator of the state's self-awareness, and can serve to project an image to the world. However, there is a fundamental difference between an official residence and other public buildings, such as museums, galleries and stadiums. Bound by perimeter walls, garrisoned by police, and accessible only to those who are invited, such buildings, almost by definition, prompt an ambivalent response from the public.[68] Such responses are dependent on factors often removed from the design of the building itself – the economy, foreign relations, the standing of the political class. In one mood the public might feel ashamed of an undignified prime minister's house; in another they might resent the extravagance of maintaining a substantial household. A fine building that projects a confident image to the rest of the world can, when times change, become a symbol of decadence and ostentation. Does this explain why Ireland lacks an officially designated prime minister's residence?

The evidence suggests that there is something more than reticence about charges of extravagance at play. Architectural history (in this case, the history of a building that was not built) offers an insight into Irish public expectations of the office of the Taoiseach. The public, while expecting a dignified head of government, has little desire to see the status and prerogatives of his office rendered in stone. The well-documented drawbacks of no official residence, such as security concerns, the lack of an intimate venue to receive guests, and, above all, the tendency for incumbents to create their own headquarters, outside of official structures, are a small price to pay to have a Taoiseach whose domestic arrangements resemble those of the general public. Politicians understand this concern. This explains the decision, for example, to designate Farmleigh as a state guest house and make no official provision for a residence. It was reflected too in the 1979 competition. The decision to appoint Aldo van Eyck to the board of assessors was significant. Van Eyck's well-known preference was for humane, well-proportioned buildings that sought to complement, rather than dominate, their surroundings. This ensured that it was the dignified, unpretentious Evans design rather than the dynamic, avant-garde flourishes of Hadid which prevailed.

ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

IAA	Irish Architectural Archive
NAI, DT	National Archives of Ireland, Department of the Taoiseach

1 *Irish Independent*, 13th April 2008.

2 Since Tony Blair's election in 1997, British prime ministers have preferred to live in the more spacious flat above 11 Downing Street (traditionally the residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer), while continuing to work in No. 10.

[3] The current Chancellor Angela Merkel, prefers to reside in her private apartment in the Mitte district of Berlin.

[4] Frank Callanan, *T.M. Healy* (Cork, 1996) 601.

[5] The title given to the Irish Free State head of government.

[6] See for example, Dáil Éireann debates, vol. 8, no. 1, cc. 67-69, 27th June 1924; David Dickson, *Dublin, The Making of a Capital City* (London, 2014) 478.

[7] For a description, see Jacqueline O'Brien and Desmond Guinness, *Great Irish Houses and Castles* (Dublin, 1992) 136-37.

[8] *Weekly Irish Times*, 27th June 1925 and 28th September 1940.

[9] See Brendan Sexton, *Ireland and the Crown, 1922-1936: the governor-generalship of the Irish Free State* (Dublin, 1989) 124-41.

[10] Adhamhnán Ó Súilleabháin, *Domhall ua Buachalla: rebellious nationalist, reluctant governor* (Sallins, 2015) 265-66.

[11] Bunreacht na hÉireann, Art. 12.11.1.

[12] *Irish Times*, 16th December 1936; *Irish Press*, 30th December 1936. St Anne's was acquired by Dublin Corporation in 1939; partially gutted by fire in 1943; derelict until 1968 in which year it was demolished; Mark Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses* (2nd rev. ed., London, 1990) 252-53.

[13] *Irish Times*, 17th April 1973, 26th August and 3rd September 1975; *Evening Herald*, 17th April 1973; *Irish Press*, 17th April 1973; *Western People*, 15th September 1973.

[14] *Irish Times*, 22nd June 1973.

[15] *ibid*.

[16] Founded in 1967, the Dublin Housing Action Committee advocated major state intervention to solve the city's housing crisis and eventually promoted squatting by homeless families. See Erika Hanna, *Modern Dublin: urban change and the Irish past, 1957-1973* (Oxford, 2013) 124-43.

[17] Dáil Éireann debates, vol. 266, no. 7, cc. 923-31, 21st June 1973.

[18] *ibid*.

[19] *Irish Times*, 8th September 1973. See also, supportive editorials in the *Evening Herald*, 26th June 1973, *Irish Independent*, 22nd June 1973.

[20] Dáil Éireann debates, vol. 279, no. 9, cc. 1429-32, 10th April 1975; vol. 282, no. 6, cc. 1056-60, 19th June 1975; vol. 289, no. 6, cc. 775-76, 1st April 1976.

[21] *Irish Times*, 11th March 1977, 29th July, 20th December 1978 and 7th January 1980, *Irish Independent*, 11th March 1977, 22nd June 1978, *Evening Herald*, 11th March 1977. The property was instead leased to the National Stud, and from 1993 to the Barretstown Gang Camp Fund, who continue to operate it as a children's charity.

[22] NAI, DT, 2009/135/218, Note for Taoiseach's information [undated].

[23] *ibid*., Report of Interdepartmental Committee on Taoiseach's Residence and State Guest House, 19th December 1978.

[24] IAA, Phoenix Park clippings, *Irish Times*, 6th January 1978, photograph.

[25] Christine Casey, *Dublin: the city within the Grand and Royal Canals and the Circular Road with the Phoenix Park* (New Haven and London, 2005) 291-92; Brendan Nolan, *Phoenix Park: a history and guidebook* (Dublin, 2012) 46; buildingsofireland.ie, entry on Ashtown Castle.

[26] NAI, DT, 2009/135/218, P. McCabe to Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach, 20th December 1978.

[27] *ibid*., Draft memorandum on Taoiseach's Residence and State Guest House, 13th November 1978.

[28] *ibid*., Report of meeting of interdepartmental committee, 6th November 1978.

[29] *ibid*., P. McCabe to Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach, 20th December 1978.

[30] *ibid*., Report of meeting of interdepartmental committee, 6th November 1978.

[31] Hanna, *Modern Dublin*.

[32] IAA, Dublin Civic Group report on the former Apostolic Nunciature building, 24th October 1978; NAI, DT, 2009/135/218, Note on meeting with conservation bodies, 10th October 1978.

[33] NAI, DT, 2009/135/218, P. McCabe to Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach, 20th December 1978.

[34] NAI, DT, 2009/135/219, Memorandum to Jack Lynch, 29th January 1979.

[35] NAI, DT, 2009/135/218, Jack Lynch to J. McCarthy, 8th December 1978.

[36] *ibid*., J. McCarthy to Jack Lynch, 13th December 1978.

[37] *ibid*., P. McCabe to Richard Stokes, 19th January 1979, and 2009/135/219, Memorandum to Jack Lynch, 29th January 1979.

[38] *Irish Independent*, 5th December 1978: 'When this country's Taoiseach finally has an official residence we will have reached the stage long ago attained by other European countries which have ensured their particular Prime Ministers

were not forced to hold important receptions in whatever building or hotel was deemed most suitable. There can be no quibbling about an official residence.' The Irish architectural profession, which seems to have presumed the competition would be open to Irish firms alone, greeted the decision with delight; see, for example, the editorial comment in *Architecture in Ireland*, vol. I, no. 4, October 1978.

[39] See, for example, NAI, DT, 2009/135/219, Michael Moloney to Jack Lynch, 14th November 1979, Bernadette D'Arcy to Jack Lynch, 10th November 1978, Máire O'Riordan to Jack Lynch, 7th November 1979, and 2010/53/272, Moyra Earner to Charles Haughey [undated, January 1980]; *Irish Times*, letter from Martin Reynolds, 6th April 1976, letter from W.G.N. Rowe, 8th January 1980; *Evening Herald*, letter from Tom Burke, 6th July 1973.

[40] NAI, DT, 2009/135/219, clipping from *Evening Herald,* 5th July 1979, and 2009/135/218, clipping from *Evening Herald*, 17th October 1979.

[41] For the government's astonishment at the response to the competition, see NAI, DT, 2009/135/218, clipping from *Hibernia*, 9th August 1979.

[42] Zaha Hadid and Aaron Betsky, *Zaha Hadid: The Complete Buildings and Projects* (London, 1998) 18.

[43] Office of Public Works (OPW) Library, Trim, county Meath, Building for Government files, *A Residence for the Taoiseach and a State Guest House* (exhibition catalogue), Architectural Association of Ireland, 1980.

[44] *ibid*.

[45] *ibid*.

[46] Van Eyck was famously scathing of post-war architects. See, for example, Nathaniel Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture* (Abingdon and New York, 2005) 29.

[47] OPW Library, Building for Government files, 'A residence for the Taoiseach and a State Guest House'.

[48] IAA, Phoenix Park clippings, *Irish Times*, 14th November 1979.

[49] Telephone conversation with Eldred Evans, 3rd January 2019.

[50] OPW Library, Architect's Report [Eldred Evans]: A Residence for the Taoiseach and a State Guest House.

[51] For further discussion, see National Library of Ireland, 'Architectural Competition for a Taoiseach's Residence and State Guest House: Assessor's Report', p.2.

[52] IAA, Phoenix Park clippings, *Irish Independent*, 14th November 1979; *Irish Press*, 18th October 1979; *Irish Times*, 19th October 1979.

[53] Dáil Éireann debates, vol. 316, no. 12, cc. 1932-33, 20th November 1979.

[54] Stephen Collins, *The Power Game: Ireland under Fianna Fáil* (Dublin, 2000) 117-21; Dermot Keogh, *Jack Lynch, A Biography* (Dublin, 2008) 434-36.

[55] But for Haughey's leading role in facilitating the destruction of large sections of Georgian Dublin, see Frank McDonald, *The Destruction of Dublin* (Dublin, 1985) esp. 96, 167.

[56] NAI, DT, 2010/53/272, press release issued by Government Information Services, 2nd January 1980.

[57] NAI, DT, 2009/135/218, Note on meeting in Taoiseach's room, Government Buildings, 28th December 1979. In 1986 the eighteenth-century house was demolished and the medieval tower house and stable court were redeveloped as a visitor centre. See Casey, *Dublin*, 292.

[58] Charles Haughey, Transcript of evidence before the Moriarty Tribunal, 24th May 2001, available at https://moriarty-tribunal.ie/.

[59] NAI, DT, 2010/53/272, Note for information [undated, 2nd/3rd January 1980].

[60] For the best account of Haughey's financial affairs, see Colm Keena, *Haughey's Millions: Charlie's money trail* (Dublin, 2001).

[61] See, for example, remarks by Bertie Ahern TD, then Minister for Finance, in *Irish Times*, 12th October 1994.

[62] *Irish Times*, 1st and 3rd June 1999.

[63] For commentary critical of the State's reluctance to purchase the property, see *The Phoenix*, 18th June 1999.

[64] Nolan, *Phoenix Park,* 53.

[65] *Evening Herald*, 28th December 2005.

[66] *Irish Independent*, 13th May 2008.

[67] *Irish Independent*, 26th December 2009: Over eighteen months after taking office, the press reported that Cowen had written a personal cheque to cover the 56 nights he had stayed in the Steward's Lodge.

[68] See Gordon Graham, 'Can There Be Public Architecture?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 64, no. 2, Spring 2006, 243-49.

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