



*1 – Aldborough House, Dublin, engraved by William Skelton, 1796  
(courtesy National Library of Ireland) (detail, see pages 104-105)*

# Aldborough House, Dublin: a construction history

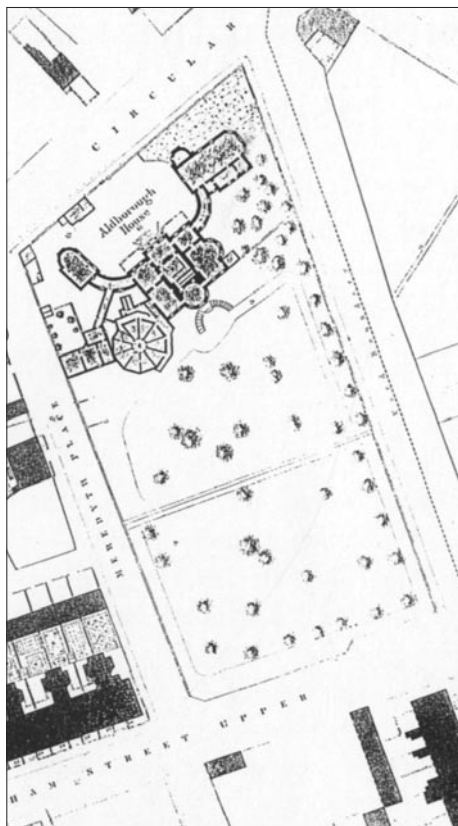
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**T**HIS ESSAY DEALS WITH THE CONSTRUCTION AND EARLY HISTORY OF ALDBOROUGH House, Dublin, from 1792 to 1813 (Plates 1, 3). The documents upon which it is primarily based form part of the Verner-Wingfield Papers in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). These passed on the death of Lord Aldborough's widow to his nephew and heir Col John Wingfield Stratford, and thence, by descent, through the family of his niece Harriet Wingfield, wife of Sir William Verner of Churchill, Co Armagh. Despite many gaps, which have been supplemented from other sources, they document in extraordinary detail the work of individual craftsmen responsible for the construction of the last great mansion of eighteenth-century Dublin, and provide a fascinating insight into its largely chaotic construction.

## BUILDING AND HISTORY

The principal character in the building of Aldborough House was Edward Augustus Stratford, 2nd Earl of Aldborough (Plate 4). Born at Belan, Co Kildare, in August 1736, he was educated at Dr Thomson's school in Leixlip before entering Trinity College Dublin in 1751. A member of the Society of Belle Lettres, 'his talents', in the words of Mary Leadbeater, 'had been made the most of by a literary education on which he seemed to pride himself'.<sup>1</sup> Despite his noted arrogance and eccentricity, he was a man of considerable ability who held doctorates of law, albeit honorary ones, from the universities of 'Oxford, Dublin, Leydon and Glasgow'. After Trinity, he settled in London, where he was thought sufficiently accomplished to be made a fellow of both the Royal and Antiquarian societies. A passionate collector of coins, medals, books and antiquities, he was also an enthusiastic patron of the arts who counted among his friends the painters Ashford and Gainsborough.<sup>2</sup> Above all, he had a strong interest in architecture and urban development, which manifested itself



2 – Aldborough House and surroundings,  
*Ordnance Survey 1847*

3 – Aldborough House,  
*engraved by William Skelton, 1796*  
*(courtesy National Library of Ireland)*



not only in the erection of follies and obelisks, but in the construction of the industrial town of Stratford-on-Slaney.<sup>3</sup> His earlier proposal, that the model town of New Geneva be established on his estate with ‘squares, gardens, churches and public buildings disposed in a circular or radial plan’, never materialised.<sup>4</sup>

Having travelled in Holland and Germany in 1772, he returned to London where he began the construction of Stratford House and Stratford Place, off Oxford Street, in 1773.<sup>5</sup> This ambitious urban development, the work of Richard Edwin, proved costly, and the house, completed in 1775, was seldom used as he returned to Ireland on the death of his father (Plate 5) in July 1777. At home he found his broth-

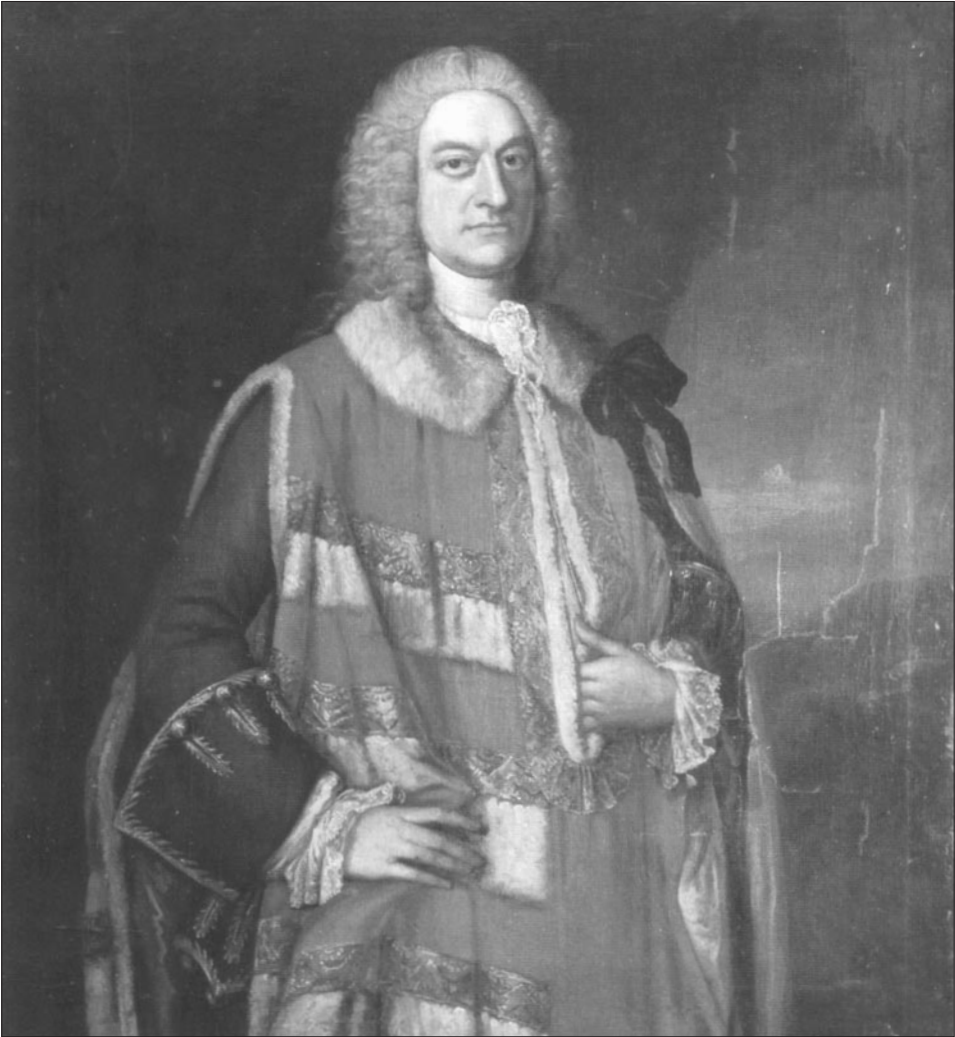


ers had helped themselves to pensions of ‘near £100,000 amount and large parcels of hereditary estate’. They had also stripped the family seat, Belan Park, of ‘every plate, furniture, stock jewel ... carrying off even the Patents and robes of Honour’, refusing to give them up unless paid for the expense.<sup>6</sup> And so, the childless 2nd Earl, having improvidently entailed most of his Irish estates on them, spent lavishly and willed his entire disposable estate away from them. In the meantime, however, he had run into serious financial difficulties with the development of Stratford Place, which no doubt hampered plans for renovating or, more likely, rebuilding Belan in the 1780s.<sup>7</sup>



4 – *Edward Augustus Stratford, 2nd Earl of Aldborough, attributed to Anthony Lee*  
(private collection)

Following the death of his wife Barbra in 1785, Lord Aldborough married Anne Eliza Henniker, the daughter of a wealthy Suffolk baronet, in May 1787 (Plate 7). His marriage to an heiress many years his junior with a dowry of £50,000 was indeed fortunate. With his financial matters apparently resolved, he turned his thoughts once more towards building. This can be deduced from a portrait painting dating to about 1787 in which Lord Aldborough and his new wife are depicted in an idealised landscape with an unidentified house (Plate 6).<sup>8</sup> The juxtaposition of a domed temple and the woods surrounding the house suggest that it is Belan. The



5 – John Stratford, 1st Earl of Aldborough  
(private collection)

building, however, bears no resemblance to the existing earlier eighteenth-century house.

It is necessary, therefore, to consider the relationship between Lord Aldborough's various houses, both built and unbuilt, in order to trace the origins of Aldborough House itself (Plates 8a-8c). The house in the painting consists of a three-storey, five-bay centre block with a three-bay Ionic pedimented breakfront. The ground floor is rusticated with round-headed windows set in shallow arches, while the windows of the *piano nobile* are pedimented. The roof is concealed



6 – *The Earl and Countess of Aldborough in a rural setting* by Francis Sartorius, c.1787  
(whereabouts unknown; courtesy David Fuller)



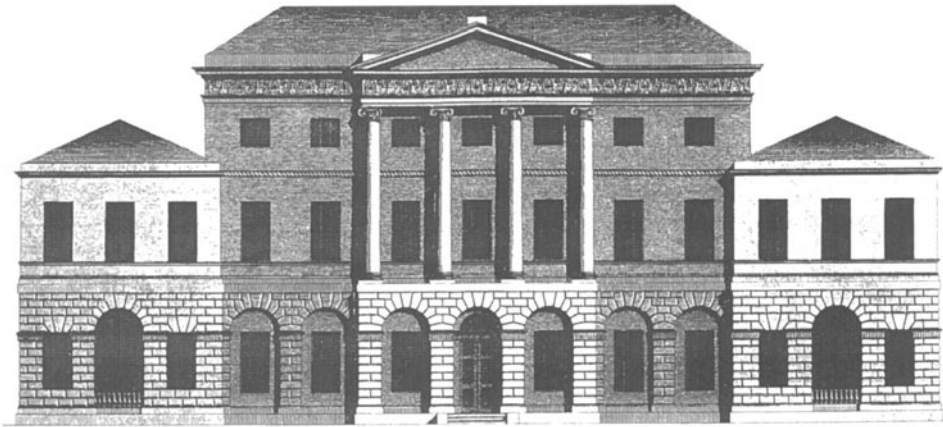
7 – *Anne Elizabeth, Countess of Aldborough, sketching a bust*, c.1787-90  
(courtesy Mrs Wingfield-Stratford-Orr)

behind a balustraded parapet surmounted by urns, with a coat of arms prominently displayed in the pediment. The central block is joined to the wings at ground-floor level by short links containing doorcases flanked by columns. The wings in turn are two-storey, three-bay structures with pyramidal roofs and ground-floor rustication. They are borrowed directly from the London residence of another Irish peer, Lord Lansdowne. If the wings are based on those of Lansdowne House, then the centre block is certainly that of Stratford House transplanted to Co Kildare. Lansdowne House, the work of Robert Adam, built between 1762 and 1767, had been suggested as a possible model for Stratford House as early as 1916.<sup>9</sup> When the features of the unexecuted house in the painting and those of Stratford House are superimposed on an elevation of Lansdowne House it becomes clear that they are variations on a theme by Robert Adam. This is surely an expression of Lord Aldborough's own personal taste.

At some point between 1787 and 1792 Lord Aldborough appears to have abandoned plans to rebuild Belan and decided instead to build a new house in Dublin, where he already had one, next door to Belvedere House in Great Denmark Street (Plate 2).<sup>10</sup> Ostentatious by nature, it is unlikely that he needed much of a pretext for building afresh. A love of architecture, the need to provide a dower house for his young wife, and a desire to surpass his neighbour, Lord Belvedere, would have proved sufficient.

Having inherited a part of the Paul estate on the North Circular Road, he now augmented that by acquiring long leases from the other co-heirs.<sup>11</sup> The first reference to the new house appears in his diary for 8 May 1792, when he 'viewed part of the late Colonel Paul's Estate at the North Strand to build on'.<sup>12</sup> The North Circular Road had not yet been built on, and Lord Aldborough perhaps thought, like the Earl of Kildare before him, that where he built, fashion would follow. Indeed, he had considerably more grounds for optimism than his predecessor, for, in the words of Lord Carlow, 'the Duchess of Rutland has her six ponies there every morning ... Lady Antrim six more, and the other ladies as many as they can get for love or money'. That it was already a place of fashionable promenade was indicated by Lord Cloncurry who, writing of Dublin in 1797, noted that 'upon that magnificent drive ... [he had] frequently seen three or four coaches and six and eight or ten coaches and four passing slowly to and fro in a long procession ... between a column of well mounted housemen'.<sup>13</sup> It seemed logical, therefore, with the ever-expanding Gardiner estate next door, that the area would become fashionably built up. Lord Aldborough intended to take full advantage of the location by not only building a great house there, but also by developing the surrounding streets, one of which still bears his name. His previous unhappy experience of property development in London, and rumours of a legislative union, did little to deter him. Work

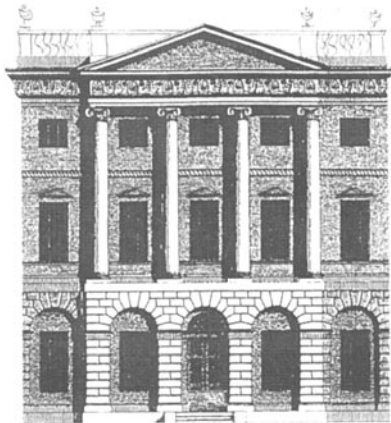




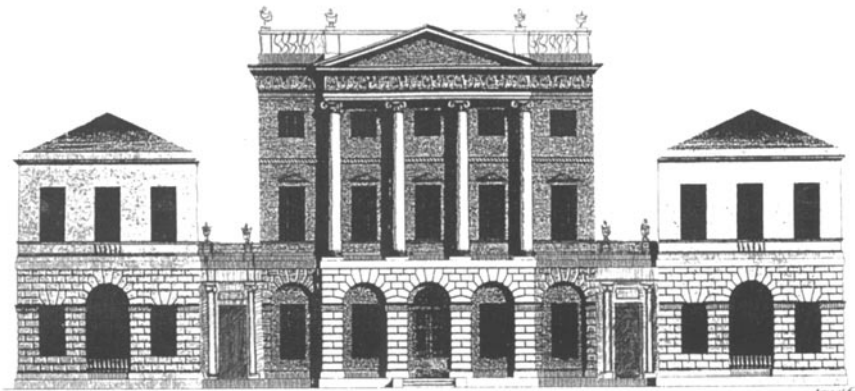
8 a – Lansdowne House,  
London

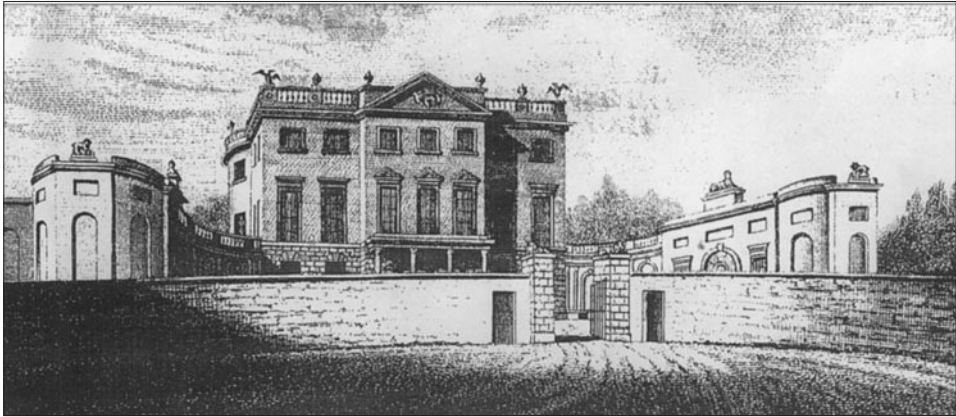
8 b – Stratford House,  
London: central block

8 c – Belan, Co Kildare:  
author's conjectural  
reconstruction of design  
for rebuilding



opposite  
9 – Aldborough House:  
entrance front, 1821  
(private collection)





began on or about the ‘1st of July 1793 when pailings were erected and the foundations begun’.<sup>14</sup>

The house on which he embarked over the next five years had obvious affinities with Stratford House, not just in terms of the centrally placed top-lit staircase, but also in terms of general form and the use of twin fore buildings with coadestone sphinxes (Plate 9). In terms of scale, Aldborough House was perhaps second only to Leinster House, and rivalled or surpassed such country houses as Townley and Rokeby Hall. It lacks, however, the refinement and sophistication of such contemporary houses, and looks back to the dying Palladian tradition with its use of curved quadrants and end pavilions.

The house, as built, consists of a three-storey, seven-bay centre block set over a high basement, which is visible only from the side or rear elevations. The ground floor is rusticated, with a flight of steps leading up to the front door, which, in turn, is set beneath a Doric portico bearing the motto *Otium Cum Dignitate* (leisure with dignity). The roof was concealed behind a balustraded parapet surmounted by urns and eagles, while an unusually deep three-bay pedimented breakfront contained the Aldborough arms, wrongly quartered in coadestone. The entrance front is faced in Wicklow granite, while the side and rear elevations are of brick, originally stuccoed to resemble ashlar. The most striking features of the central block are the remarkably elongated windows of the *piano nobile*, in detail reminiscent of those at Richard Johnson’s Rotunda Assembly Rooms of 1784.

Curved quadrants in the outmoded Palladian manner linked the main house to the end pavilions which contained both theatre and chapel, one of which is now demolished. These links consisted of a series of blind arches flanked by engaged Doric columns of Portland stone, which, in turn, supported entablatures with delicate balustraded parapets, also of Portland stone. The end pavilions, with three-bay

side elevations facing the courtyard, had centrally placed fanlighted doorcases approached by steps which gave direct access to the theatre and chapel. Both end pavilions terminated in bows containing blind arches facing the street, and were decorated with coade-stone panels, like those above the windows.<sup>15</sup> Lions and sphinxes of the same material surmounted the pavilions, while in the centre of the courtyard stood a copy of the Apollo Belvedere, perhaps also of coade stone.<sup>16</sup>

A payment of £100 to 'Mr. Johnson' at the end of the financial year 1793-94 would seem to indicate that the noted Irish architect Richard Johnson was responsible for the original designs.<sup>17</sup> Johnson's involvement at Aldborough House continued until March 1796, and both his successors were paid the same amount per year. An account dated 7 October 1793 names all those employed and their rates of pay.<sup>18</sup> In all, there were forty-six men: three stonecutters, twelve carpenters, thirteen brickworkers, ten bricklayers-labourers, and seven of Lord Aldborough's own labourers. On average, the labourers earned between 8s and 10s a week, carpenters 19s 6d and brickworkers 16s 3d. The stonecutters, however, fared best, two of the three employed earning the sum of £1 5s a week.

Between 30 September and 12 October, one James Quin supplied '17 loads of Quarrystone ... plus 108 Loads of Walling stones to the site'. On 3 June 1794 the *Dublin Evening Post* reported on the work in progress: 'Lord Aldborough has entered upon a splendid building on the North Strand, adjoining the Circular road – the situation is rather low for prospect, – notwithstanding which his Lordship means to expend no less than fifty thousand pounds in a mansion-house, the work of it now briskly goes forward.'<sup>19</sup> However, in the *Dublin Evening Post* of 13 September 1794, the first signs of trouble had begun to appear: 'The Earl of Aldborough's mansion in the North Strand, which was to rival Leinster House in architecture and magnificence, goes on but slowly, owing it is said to so insignificant a difficulty as a 'quarrel' with his Lordship's timber merchant.'<sup>20</sup>

The obvious reason for this quarrel, and most of the other difficulties which plagued the project in the years ahead, was money. It was inevitable that Lord Aldborough would eventually overstretch his finances as most of his wealth was tied up in property and he had already experienced liquidity problems with building Stratford Place.<sup>21</sup> His litigious nature, and the fact that he was involved in at least three major lawsuits during the 1790s, proved a considerable drain on his resources. As a result, by the summer of 1795 the full impact was being felt by those employed at Aldborough House. On 14 June Thomas Dennell, Clerk of Works, wrote:

I must inform your Lordship, things are not going on here with Spirit, but left open to the Censure of Every Spectator that passes the Road, Seeing such a Superb Building, with so few hands at work, and plenty of materials ... The

deficiencies on Saturday Since the 4th of April has amounted last Saturday to £81-0-2 – for the want of which Sum, poor Journeymen + Labourers have Quitt the work for better Subsistence (as they term it) ... Hendrick's (brick-layer) Common Labourers have deserted from him and Graham's (carpenters) best men have served him no better, tho a great deal of the finest Sashes in the World have been made by them ... A combination is ripe to be put in force, that those who are Not paid on Saturday Nights Shall Not work on the Monday following in any Buildings in Town.<sup>22</sup>

Problems did not end there, however, and there is an air of desperation on Dennell's part which prompts him to write so bluntly to his employer. He observes that Mr Fagan's 'Mountain Quarry Men will not send any more stone without present payment as times are so hard and the Common Necessarys So dear', and that 'for your own Honour, I shall beg you give Mr. Beresford orders to pay what may be necessary on the days of payment, otherwise what Yr Lordship would Expect Cannot be Accomplished.'

Among other names frequently mentioned is that of the 'Projector', or draftsman Robert Allison of 40 Meklenburgh Street.<sup>23</sup> He appears to have been a deeply unpopular functionary who had the power to issue sums of money on Aldborough's behalf. In a letter dated 2 September 1795, Dennell wrote that:

... if Mr. Allison would give Graham the drawing for the Roof he might proceed, as he has the wall plates framed and knows nothing of the Elevation ... It's all a harmony between the people Consigned here Except Mr. Allison and Graham, Your Lordship knows where the Grievence lies, the Slates are on the River and I cannot take on me to Receive them without Mr. Allison[']s Consent, not knowing who shall do the work, I mean that Creighton has them, and me and Mr. Allison are Not friends...'<sup>24</sup>

Apart from the obvious personal tensions, it seems extraordinary that over two years after work commenced, Graham, who had been employed since 1793, had not seen the roof drawing. All that can be said is that there was a clear lack of adequate supervision throughout.

In the same letter Dennell informed his Lordship that the mason, Fagan, had 'got the Moulds this day for the Back Stairs, which had protracted some time [and that] Mr. Walsh has kept the Brickworkers at work but Not any Great Quantity on hand'. Mr Walsh was a brickmaker who, according to Dennell, 'Excells every other person who carries on the manufacture of Bricks'. He had previously supplied £100-17-2 worth of place and stock bricks on 11 July before being advanced another £100 to 'Enable him to carry on his Business'. Dennell also referred to the chief

carver Mr Ellis as 'Not having any person to assist him on the other Figure', but that the block of marble which had been laid open that day promised well. This carver in question was probably George Ellis, stone carver of 30 Mabbot Street.<sup>25</sup> In conclusion, Dennell wrote that 'no stones had come in from the Mountains since [his] Lordship's departure but one Window head'. With reference to the wings he noted that 'the wall Next the Strand is 6 feet above the Joists, all as far as the Rere, and the Flank to the North is above the window Stools'.

On 2 November 1795, James Hendrick Jr, bricklayer, of 37 Basin Street, recorded the state of the works when he wrote:

The Stonecutters are going on tollerably well, the principal work, that I am going on with is backing them up and building the Collonades, I expect to have a part of the rere covered in a few days, then I can go on with the large Vaults, with great safety, I have also the three front stacks of Chimneys to go on with when the stone work is a little higher.<sup>26</sup>

The external structure of the house, though not the wings, was nearing completion by the beginning of 1796. Unfortunately, work on the entrance front and roof was delayed by the late delivery of two window heads.<sup>27</sup> Henceforth the focus shifts increasingly towards internal matters. The following letter to Lord Aldborough from an otherwise unknown stuccodore named Mathew Cogan, dated 3 November 1795, is of particular interest:

My Lord,

your former propositions when I was in London now induce me to apply for a preference of the plastering and ornament works of your Lordship's House in dublin. [I]f pleasing to your Lordship to grant me a preference it shall be my study to afford as well performed works as any in dublin and as moderately Charged for. Your Lordship may be assured if Honoured with your Commands that no imposition should teak place, by any person concerned by stenting in quantity, or quallety of meterials, or slight in operation...<sup>28</sup>

Cogan, a native of Baltinglass, Co Wicklow, was obviously acquainted with Lord Aldborough, having previously 'conducted and performed' work for his brother-in-law, Morley Saunders, at Saunder's Grove. A highly experienced Stuccodore, he had spent 'eleven years in London and other parts of England, and fourteen years in this Kingdom', during which time he had 'annctiously persued aquiring the knowledge of the principals [of] building'. This induced him to 'compile such errors, and trespasses with modes of detection as shall be found assential in ... seafly guideing the inexperienced propreiator, or workman'. While observing that 'the contents of my first book will appeer in the dublin newspapers in the course of this month titled the

true informer, and builders Director, price 2s 8d', so far, despite much effort, this work has not come to light.

Meantime, another stuccodore, Michael Curren, was busy, as the upper rooms and back stairs were ready to lath and plaster.<sup>29</sup> He thought it best that all the rooms be dashed before the carpenters began, but found it impossible to do so, as there were only two or three labourers to assist him, thereby providing all the more reason to employ an experienced stuccodore such as Cogan. However, the following letter from Cogan to his employer, written between March and June of 1796, illustrates the work in progress, and the difficulties, both financial and otherwise, of being employed by Lord Aldborough:

My Lord,

I beg Liberty to inform [you] that the cornises are finished in My Leadey's room, two dressing rooms and two powdering rooms – the ceiling of the bow room is Lathed and scrach coated – and the ceilings of the other two rooms floated and now preparing for the cornises in Do the grounds are not yet put up, which prevents me from going on with the walls.<sup>30</sup>

The rooms referred to were undoubtedly those on the second floor which contain two bow-fronted bedrooms, one with adjoining closets. He continues:

...there is very bad unregular attendance of Labourers ... I am mostley confined to one labourer at times two. I am informed by Mr. Johnson that there is above double the amount of Labourers – charged that has been given ... Inexperient and prejudiced persons teak maney Libertys in redoculeing, and obstructing me in performing or forwarding work ... I can afford convincing proofs of the many Losses Sustained true want of better regulations. I further beg leave to inform your Lordship that the preference granted me in your ... employment has procured many Enemees and persons not suspected ... have so misrepresented me as to prevent me from obtaining one shillings worth of credit ... It shall be my studdy to prevent anny imposition by indolence or neglect of any person concerned with me, but not in my power to administer Justice – whilst I am kept subject to be governed by My Enemy's and persons of inexperience ... hopes in Your Lordships directions to adadapt better regulation...

Had Aldborough thought that Cogan exaggerated the situation he was mistaken, as the following letter from Curren indicates:

My Lord

it is a troubel to me to see how Bussines is Carrying on here and i would have let your Lordship no be four now but i was afraid of my life,

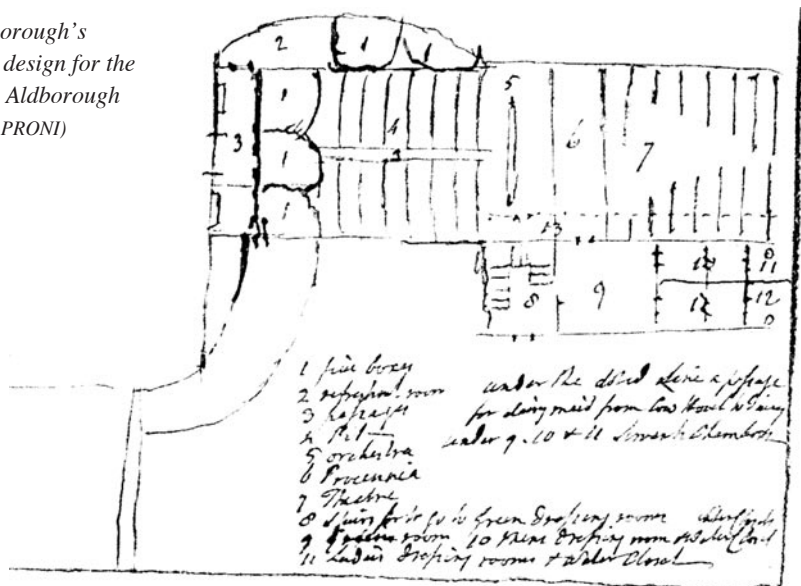
there is no attention paid by the greatest part of the men imploy'd ... here. Only when Your Lordship is in the building ... Labourers do as they please – and the tradesmen the same have the most well taken care of would do more than all that is imploy'd – if you Lordship do not send or get some proper person the house will not be finished this seven years.<sup>31</sup>

There is a definite air of desperation in these letters as they lurched from crisis to crisis, lacking both regulations and adequate remuneration.

Had Richard Johnson been employed full time it is unlikely that such anarchy would have prevailed. It seems likely that his work was limited to occasionally measuring and overseeing work. It would appear that Aldborough, when present, inspected work, and that the burden of directing or overseeing affairs must have fallen increasingly on the shoulders of men like Allison, Dennell, Hendrick and Cogan. The reason for this was undoubtedly money or, more precisely, Lord Aldborough's lack of it, for in 1796 he found himself immersed in yet further litigation regarding the foreclosure of a mortgage on an unspecified property (possibly Aldborough House itself). It is understandable, therefore, that labourers, artisans and even architects were reluctant to remain in his employment.

Lord Aldborough probably had a considerable input into the design of the house, as a rough drawing for the theatre wing would indicate (Plate 10).<sup>32</sup> This, in the absence of any architectural drawings, is of particular significance as it shows the theatre as originally envisaged. His drawing, though crude, is extremely detailed, consisting of five boxes, refreshment room, pit, orchestra and proscenium.

10 – Lord Aldborough's undated sketch design for the theatre wing at Aldborough House (courtesy PRONI)



Backstage, even the position of the scenery is indicated, as are the green room and two dressing rooms with water closets. These rooms are located directly above the servants' chambers, to which they are linked by a small staircase, while beneath the stage a passage from the cow house to the dairy is marked. The theatre, as it was built, was no more than a compact, scaled-down version of this design. All traces of the columns, cornice and panels which once decorated it have long since disappeared, though the stage survived until the 1980s.<sup>33</sup> The theatre was entered along a curved passage from the main house or directly from the courtyard. Of the adjoining chapel wing little can be said, except that it was a small rectangular, three-bay room with a simple cornice, a bow at one end containing the altar, and a gallery at the other.<sup>34</sup> As with the theatre, it could be entered through a passage from the main house or from the courtyard.

Johnson's involvement in the work, tenuous as it was, had ended by the summer of 1796, when he was replaced by an otherwise unknown architect named Jason Harris. As regards terms of employment, with Harris we are on firmer ground as the articles of agreement with Lord Aldborough on 22 June 1796 reveal his responsibilities more precisely:

...for Superintending the Completion of his Lordships House Colonades and Offices – Measuring the respective Works to be measured and Drawing the Design of Elevations and laing out of the Stables and Offices said Earl is to pay Mr. Harris the sum of One hundred Pounds Sterling...<sup>35</sup>

On 26 July, scarcely a month after his appointment, he wrote:

I ... am sorry the nature of my employments will not permit me to pay that attention which ... Your Lordship expected should be paid to Aldborough House; and tho fully sensible of the honour dome me, must beg leave to decline the business.<sup>36</sup>

Having obviously learnt the nature of Aldborough's finances, he sought to extricate himself without delay. However, Aldborough must have held him to their agreement as he was involved, to some extent, until April of 1797. He continued:

With respect to the Staircase, if Your Lordship will please to recollect, your directions were not determinate, and must observe that, tho the windows on the first flight are disagreeable, there appears no possibility of avoiding them. The Staircase acording to plan will entirely spoil the House ...

Harris is referring to Cogan's proposals for the main staircase (Plates 11, 12). This afforded 'By two galleries ... a separate recourse to each apartment on the Drawing room floor' as well as a second flight to the chamber storey. The 'two oval lights' on



the first flight were necessary to light the otherwise dark back stairs.<sup>37</sup> As built, the first flight differs somewhat from Cogan's design as it rises in two straight stages. The back stairs is also cantilevered into one of these walls, which has resulted in major structural problems since the 1790s. Cogan had also offered the more structurally sound alternative of taking the back stairs from the first floor to the 'chamber storey', with a 'thurrow gallery' lighting the main stairs and affording access to the bedrooms. This, however, was too practical for Lord Aldborough's tastes, and he opted instead for the more ostentatious alternative. His preference for centrally placed top-lit staircases was nothing new, as the arrangement is borrowed directly from his London house of the 1770s.

On 4 April 1797 Harris also provided an estimate for the ornamental iron railing of the grand staircase. In it he refers to '67 steps with 3 bars on each step – brass pateras scrolls top and bottom and horizontal rail at top with plain rings in Do between each barr'.<sup>38</sup> This and another set of rails on the landing would have amounted to £102 15s. Given the worsening financial situation, it is likely that Aldborough opted instead for the cheaper plain balustrade still in situ.

Apart from the staircase, Harris was also concerned with the vaults and areas to the front of the house, which were delayed as he collected the necessary information respecting levels, distance of columns from the front, etc. Nor was that the only cause of delay as 'the men for one week turned out for increase of Wages', and, as a result, the designs for the stables were not completed. However, he promised to submit them for his Lordship's approbation at the beginning of the next week, observing that these things require much time and consideration to adjust properly. He added: 'I will pay what attention I can to the building till Your Lordship return to town.'

Although Lord Aldborough was quite hands-on in his approach, his directions were often indeterminate. This was a problem not just for Cogan and Curren, but also for Harris who, having been instructed to order a large quantity of Portland stone for the stairs, could not cut it without his Lordship's direction. The need to refer such decision-making to Aldborough, and his frequent indecisiveness, must have slowed the work considerably.

Plastering was still in progress on 9 September 1797 when Mathew Cogan provided an estimate.<sup>39</sup> From it we learn that 'wall plastering ... coated and floated and fit for painting cost 8d per yard. A hallow ceiling floated and coated cost 16d per yard. Inrichst. Cornises with plean freses according to design ... perfumed in the gretest releif, cost between 2s-2d per foot and 3s-6d.' This included the cost of finding materials. It should be noted that with the exception of the slender Ionic pilasters in the entrance hall and the ceiling rose since removed, there appears to have been little ornamental plasterwork. The cornices of the 'dining room story' or ground floor were plain, all of which points towards the need for economy.

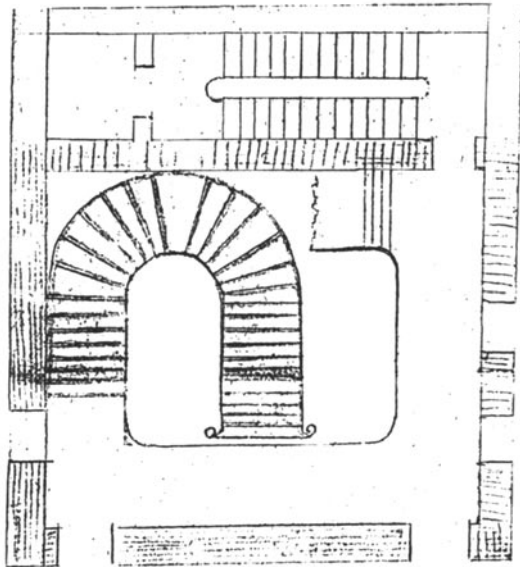


11 – Cross-section showing the stairwell at Aldborough House

(courtesy Howley Harrington Architects)

12 – Unexecuted proposal for the great staircase at Aldborough House by Mathew Cogan

(courtesy PRONI)



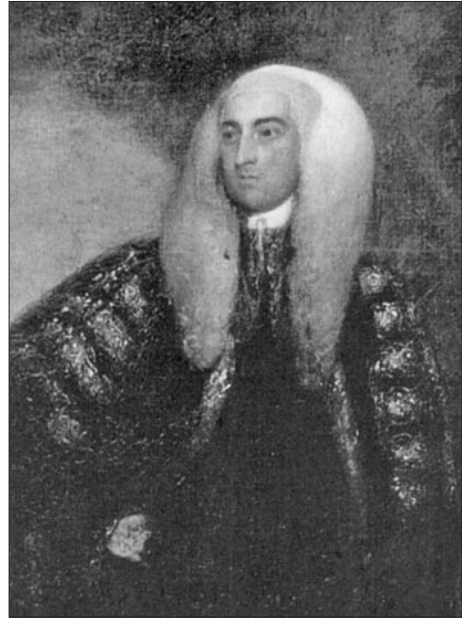
Cogan was not alone in producing an estimate for stuccowork, as an undated example illustrates (Appendix 1).<sup>40</sup> This record is of particular interest as it is the first and only document to come to light bearing the signature of the elusive marble inlayer Peter Bossi. It confirms the longstanding tradition that he worked at Aldborough House. The *Georgian Society Records* in 1912 claimed that several Bossi mantles were removed from the house, the architect responsible for their removal to the Commissioners of Public Works in 1898 being none other than the Society's own secretary, Robert Cochrane. Unfortunately, all efforts to locate these mantles have failed. On 26 September, Cogan afforded his Lordship proofs by model of the offices as now in an 'expressive state'.<sup>41</sup> There were four urns 'to answer the top of the hauce', of which at least one, a 'blaise urn', was later supplied by the mason Thomas Baker at a cost of £2 5s 6d. The coach house, stables and coal sheds, designed by Harris and located to the north-west of the house, remained unroofed for at least another month. As regards the passages and apartment of the basement storey, Cogan considered flagging would be preferable to that of 'Either Fierstone or Carlow', though the latter was cheap at 2s 6d per yard. In total, there were 335ft of passages and 170 yards of apartments to be flagged at basement level, while, upstairs, that of the platform beneath the portico was almost complete. Indoors, the floor of the circular room was laid, though it and that of other rooms were not equal to his wishes. Once more he writes that, 'it has been by strike the different men has been kept from ... Your Lordships Works and true mains of not being regularly paid in full weekly'.

As regards heating, Lord Aldborough opted for the newly invented Rumford stove, several of which were delivered by order of Mathew Cogan between 17 October and 3 November. Fortunately, the bill from Ferris and Orr, Iron-Mongers, of 87 Pill Lane, survives. From it we learn that a Rumford stove grate cost 16s 3d and a metal frame mounted with sliding and double doors, bolt, latch register, cost £1 6s.<sup>42</sup> The stoves referred to were probably intended for the basement rooms, particularly the kitchen beneath the bow room (music room) and the laundry. In fact, the 'Laundry stove and plate' cost £1 4s 7d, while a 'door and frame' cost an extra 6s.

On 16 January 1797 a dispute arose with the Lord Chancellor, Lord Clare (Plate 14), who had previously decided two suits against Aldborough (Plate 13).<sup>43</sup> One of these related to the purchase of property on the Dublin-Wicklow border, which Aldborough could not afford due to the expense of building his new house. Resorting to print, Aldborough accused the Lord Chancellor of deliberately preventing him from purchasing the property and of showing favouritism towards his relative, Marcus Beresford. Lord Clare (who was also Speaker of the House of Lords), having acquired a copy of the offensive pamphlet, denounced it as 'one of the most infamous and daring libels ever uttered against any individual or legislative



13 – Edward Augustus Stratford, 2nd Earl of Aldborough, attributed to William Cumming  
(courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)



14 – John FitzGibbon, Earl of Clare, c.1789-90, by Gilbert Stuart and assistants  
(courtesy Board of Trinity College Dublin)

Assembly’. This later resulted in Aldborough’s prosecution for libel in the House of Lords. Such litigation could not have come at a worse time. In response to Aldborough’s pleas for help, his father-in-law, Sir John Henniker, replied, ‘I am very sorry you began the House. No One might be more happy than Your Self – But building has ever made you otherwise – I will never on that score or any other enter into matters of money.’<sup>44</sup> Henniker was, however, not prepared to see his daughter go short, and continued to provide for her while stubbornly resisting his son-in-law’s requests. However, such money must inevitably have been spent on legal and building expenses.

Meanwhile, work continued, with a prominent mason, Thomas Baker, providing an ‘Estimate for Sawing masoning and seting Lord Aldboroughs Gt stairs ... at a cost of £227’.<sup>45</sup> Baker completed 170 feet of ‘cornice on [the] greater part of the West and the whole of the North front’ – left unfinished by his predecessor Mr Steel– at a cost of £154 4s 8d.<sup>46</sup> He also set eighty-five ballusters and cut the paterae in the dies for the pedestals, upon which he would later mount coade-stone urns and eagles. The mottoes and date 1796 in Roman numeral on the north front were also his work, done at a cost of 9s 9d. Harris, having declined the job of architect the previous July, continued to measure work occasionally, until his replacement in the

spring of 1797 by the equally obscure Dan Murphy, Architect.<sup>47</sup> Like Harris, he worked in conjunction with Thomas Baker as measurer, and a payment of £100 to Mr Murphy 'Architect while building' is recorded at the beginning of the following year.<sup>48</sup> On 22 April 1797 Cogan provided an estimate for finishing the basement rooms:

My Lord

on the most reduced prices for ironwork metalw, plumberw, Carpentry, stone cutting and brickwork, finding Each and Every material with intier Labour in finishing ... the Kitchen, Laundry, drying room and scullerey ... £185-15s-6d.<sup>49</sup>

The 'plaen Cornises' of the 'dining room storey', or ground floor, could also be performed 'in the best manner plean' at a cost of £11 7s 6d. Despite cost-cutting on decorative detail, in July 1797 Lord Aldborough entered into an agreement with the otherwise unknown artist John Meares to paint the main reception rooms and the great staircase at Aldborough House.<sup>50</sup> Little is known of Meares except that he entered the Dublin Society Schools on 5 October 1769, where he studied architecture, ornament and landscape.<sup>51</sup> Prior to working at Aldborough House, he would appear to have been employed at Belan. He was also a miniaturist who exhibited at the Society of Artists of Ireland in Dublin in 1802 and 1804, giving his address as Aldborough House.<sup>52</sup> From 1797 to 1799 Meares evidently executed figure paintings in the dining room, stair hall and other rooms at Aldborough House.

On 3 July 1797 Aldborough failed in his final attempt to resolve the dispute with Lord Clare by making a general apology to the Chancellor and the House of Lords. The way was now open for his trial before the House of Lords, which took place on 30 November. On 12 February 1798 Judge Downes, by 'a vile judgement on as vile a verdict', committed him to Newgate for twelve months and fined him £1,000. Despite his imprisonment, Aldborough kept a close eye on the work in progress, and was irritated by certain creditors who were perpetually bothering him. He thought it 'enough to pay every man his debt once', and wrote to Murphy that 'as matters now stand [I] cannot be certain of doing even that long'.<sup>53</sup> Apart from entertaining large numbers of guests, he found more practical ways of spending his days in the 'enchanted castle' of Newgate. On 21 March he 'painted, pasted and cut out and almost completed in 2 days a two leaf fancy skreen'. This and another matching screen were no doubt intended for the new house, where many of the rooms would likewise be decorated with prints. Emerging from prison after six weeks he wrote: 'Let from the 12th of February to the 29th March be blotted from my calender unless to humble myself before my God and gracious deliverer!' Matters did not end there, however, as he still faced the prospect of two more law-

suits: one was the Lord Chancellor's for personal and punitive damages, and another concerned Aldborough House. In all likelihood, the latter was a dispute regarding the boundary of his property, while the former would end with a humiliating apology to Lord Clare in November.

Despite debt, imprisonment and rebellion, work continued at Aldborough House and would be completed within the year. On 18 April Thomas Baker submitted his bill for the stonecutting of the theatre, the best part of which, with its cornice and columns, would not be roofed until July. On 6 August Baker was paid in full for his work on the theatre, 'all but putting up Lyon and Sphynx'.<sup>54</sup>

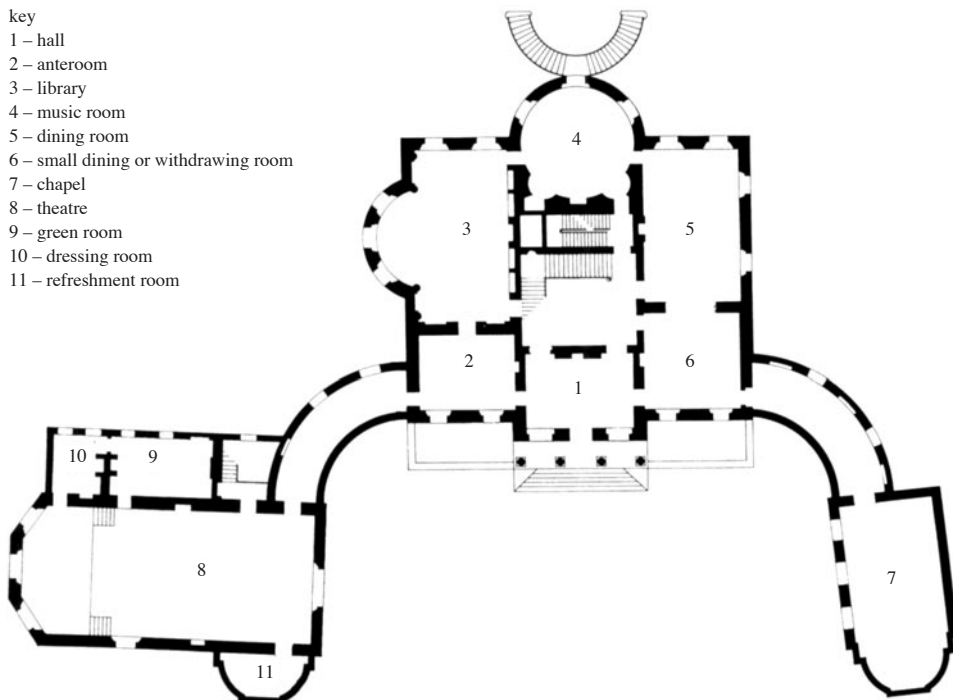
## PRINCIPAL ROOMS

Work in the central block had now entered its final phase, and what follows is an attempt, using original documents, to identify the principal rooms, reconstructing their appearance where possible, starting with the ground-floor entrance hall and moving in a clockwise direction around the central stairwell (Plate 15). The rooms are as follows: anteroom, library, music room, dining room and a small dining room or withdrawing room.

In the three-bay entrance hall, the front doorcase is flanked by round-headed windows, framed by slender Ionic pilasters and friezes, and surmounted by a fanlight. This contains the only remaining decorative stuccowork in the house. Opposite the front door stood a marble chimney piece, possibly by Bossi. At either end of the hall are Adamesque doorcases surmounted by casts of the *Borghese Dancers* (now in the Louvre) (Plate 17). The only other features of note are the two doorcases with fanlights (Plate 16), and medallions which stand on either side of the chimney breast, leading into the stair hall.

The next room probably served as anteroom to both the library and theatre. Its marble chimney piece, like all others in the house, has long since been removed. It contains little of note, except the two standard Adamesque door cases, above which are the faint outlines of what appear to be decorative lunettes or relieving arches. The anteroom contained a painted ceiling completed on 12 May 1798 and, like all the ground and first-floor rooms, must originally have had a gilt pier and chimney glasses.

The adjoining library fills the remainder of the eastern elevation and has a large central bow. There are four slender, engaged composite columns with green marblised shafts along the bow wall, between which stand in-built bookcases whose latticed wire doors and mirrored glass have long since disappeared.<sup>55</sup> Beyond the bookcases are the competently carved but clumsily executed doorcases leading to



15 – Ground-floor plan of Aldborough House  
(based on plan courtesy National Archive)

the music room and stairwell, above which can be seen the outline of lunettes (Plate 18). The doorcase from the library into the anteroom is similar to the others in date, but contains a finely moulded, though somewhat awkward rectangular panel. The most likely explanation is that it represents a change of mind on Aldborough's behalf; indeed, the clumsy handling of the work in general suggests a lack of adequate supervision. The ceiling of the library was decorated by 'Philippo Zafforini', who was employed on 12 June 1798 to paint the '1st floor [stretches] of stair case and panels and the ceiling and cornices of Ball and Anteroom and ceiling of Library for 30 guineas'.<sup>56</sup> Zafforini, of 5 Loftus Lane, was a scene painter and miniaturist employed at Crow Street and Peter Street theatres between 1798 and 1811.<sup>57</sup>

From the library, we enter the music room, one of two circular rooms in the house, both containing large niches. The clue to its use is to be found in its one surviving Adamesque doorcase, the frieze of which contains lyres, swags and crossed violins, while the central tablet depicts dancing female figures and musicians. This room contained mirrored shutters reflecting the views of the garden beyond which could be reached by means of an elegant double-perron staircase (Plate 19).<sup>58</sup> As with most of the reception rooms, the ceiling was probably painted. The walls were



*Aldborough House*

*16 – Entrance hall*

*(courtesy Irish Architectural  
Archive)*

*17 – Detail of a doorcase in  
the entrance hall with an  
overdoor of a cast of the  
Borghese Dancers*

*(courtesy Irish Architectural  
Archive)*







18 – Aldborough House, detail of library doorcase  
(courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)

certainly pasted with prints by Aldborough himself, some of which he bordered.<sup>59</sup> The room was decorated with sculpted busts and centaurs, a marble mantle, floral blinds and, no doubt, a gilt chimney glass. It probably also contained one of Lord Aldborough's two pianofortes or two harpsichords, one of which was imported from London secondhand.

The next room at the rear right-hand corner of the plan, or south-west corner, is the dining room, or eating parlour, which was directly connected with the kitchen beneath the music room by means of the back stairs. Due to fire damage, the room contains little of interest except its original mirrored shutters, the mirrored glass of which has long since been removed. The ceiling was painted by Meares to represent the marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne. In a letter dated 24 August 1800 he described his work and the difficulty of obtaining payment:

My Lord,

I find by the Calculation of all the money I have received ... there is some backmoney ... due to me ... at the Expiration of the two last years ending in July 1799. If you recollect Yr Lordship agreed with me at Belan the Summer of ... 1797, to go to Aldborough house to paint, and you was to settle to pay me £50 per year and to call me your own Artist and to eat at table



19 – Aldborough House, garden front, 1821  
(private collection)

Gratis, But Alas there is no table now Gratis, during the two last years the paintings I have done at Aldborough house are Valued to at least 3 hundred pounds every person that behold them say so, If Yr Lordship would be kind enough ... to pay me off ... there may not be any misunderstanding or disagreement between us ... And as for the 3rd year which now comences we may settle that hereafter ... I do assure you that the eating parlor ceiling is beautiful for I have taken a good deal of pains with it tis so full of human figures the Centre pannel with painted figures as large as life, Representing the Marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne (Ruddy Bacchus with Golden hair conspicuous of the beauty of Ariadne marries the Daughter of Minos King of Crete) So that the Loyal family of Minos is introduced in the Ceremony and the attendance of Bacchus also in the Back screen, The whole making a most Grand Apperance. The triumph of Bacchus is a common drunken sotish device and not so modest as the marriage ... for that reason I took the liberty to prefer the marriage. The rest of the pannels of Ceiling are all emblematic figures to correspond. In Mr Murphys time here I could buy Clothes, but now what money I receive weekly I am obliged to buy provisions and paints ... Mr Murphy's going away is a loss to me because of living at table Gratis with him, I do assure Yr Lordship that I want a supply of Materials — , as I

can not go on with your work with a small sum, if possible you could let me be paid £10 or ten guineas to dispose of in a proper manner ...

I remain, Your Lordship and Ladys Most Obedient and Most Humble Servt, John Meares.<sup>60</sup>

At one end of the dining room are double doors flanked by delicate, slender Ionic pilasters which lead into a small two-bay room at the north-west corner of the building, possibly a private dining room or withdrawing room, since fire-damaged.

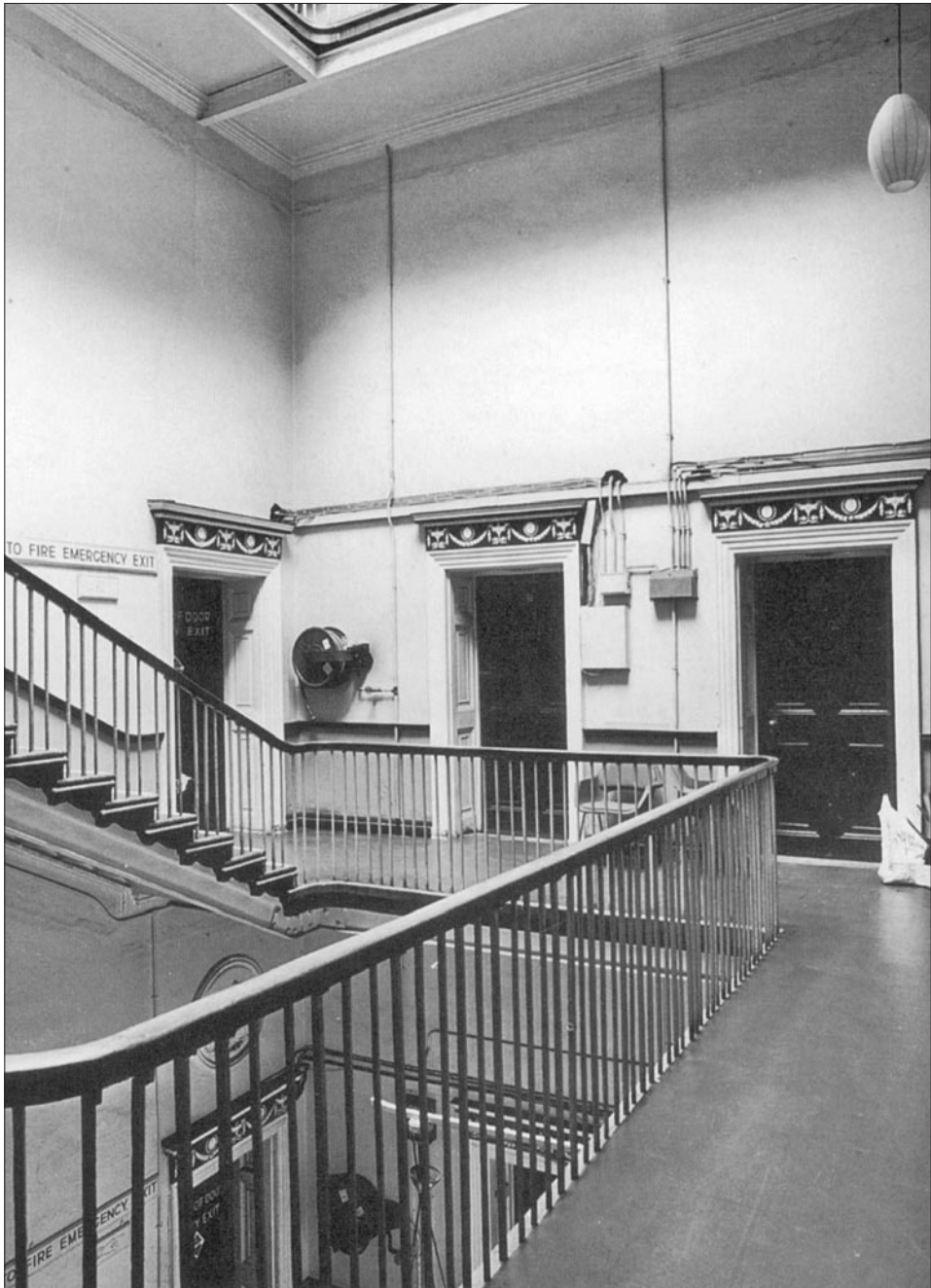
Having completed a circuit of the ground-floor rooms, we mount the great staircase, the paintings of which were described by the newly arrived vicereine, Lady Hardwicke, in 1801:

The staircase is richly adorned with paintings. Let one be in your idea a model for the rest. Imagine a large panel occupied by the 'Triumph of Amphitrite', personated by Lady Aldborough in a riding habit, with minerva's helmet, sitting on the knee of Lord Aldborough in a complete suit of regimentals, Neptune having politely resigned his seat in the car to his Lordship, and contenting himself with the office of coachman to the six well fed tritons. The whole corps of sea-nymphs attend the car in the dress of Nereids! But each, instead of vocal shell bears in her hand a medallion with the picture (the head and shoulders as large as life) of an admiral's-wigs, baldheads, crops etc, Think of a whole mansion decorated in this way!<sup>61</sup>

The paintings seen by Lady Hardwicke were probably located on the first-floor landing where the walls are much higher than those at ground-floor level (Plate 20). The admirals referred to were St Vincent and Duncan, by Zafforini, while the figure of Lady Aldborough may have been by Meares, who also painted Achilles, Alexander, Caesar, Cromwell, King William and Lord Cornwallis.

The figures were completed by 5 July 1798, but the first panel to receive them was not begun until 20 July.<sup>62</sup> This would suggest that the paintings throughout the house were possibly executed on canvas and fixed to the walls or ceilings. A note of Aldborough seeking information about the size and number of large paintings exists in which he asks whether the cheap varnished ones would do for the ceiling. He refers to 'two round ones for ceiling', and asks whether Meares could do 'two more to match and an oval for bedroom'. These appear to have come in a variety of sizes, 'upright', 'oval' and 'circular, in gilt frames'.<sup>63</sup> Nor, it would appear, were Meares and Zafforini alone in providing paintings for him, as there is a single reference to 'Mr Cumming, 22 Crow Street, Chiaro oscuro painter', who may also have painted Aldborough's portrait in the 1790s.<sup>64</sup>

The first-floor rooms are similarly arranged to those on the ground floor but



20 – Aldborough House, staircase hall, first-floor landing  
(courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)

are much loftier and more impressive. They consist of a suite of interlocking reception rooms, admirably designed, for entertaining on a grand scale. The largest room was probably the ballroom, located directly above the library, the panels, ceiling and cornice of which were decorated by Zafforini.<sup>65</sup> Like the library, it has a bow and four engaged Corinthian columns, the shafts of which are of salmon-coloured scagliola, perhaps the work of Bossi. From the ballroom, an awkwardly placed door containing an oval panel leads into the south-facing circular room, which differs little from the music room below. It too could have served as the music room, but lacks the musical decorations of the latter. Its marble mantle and grate, and the moulded panel above it, were removed in the 1890s. Of the remaining first-floor rooms only one is worthy of note, namely the three-bay room above the portico whose coved ceiling contains a central oval panel. The second floor consisted mainly of bedrooms, of which two bow-fronted ones with adjoining closets are exceptionally large. The wooden mantles and painted oval by Meares have long since disappeared, as has the wallpaper and pasted prints so beloved of Aldborough.

To the already elaborate interiors, decorated with paintings, prints, mantles and mirrored shutters (Plates 21-23) can be added the following list of furnishings:

a variety of chairs, Northumberland Oval and other Dining Tables; Breakfast, Card Work and Dressing ditto; a Mahogany Library Table; Circular and Tambour, several Pier Tables, with Marble and other tops; Pier Commodes, Circular Book-stand, Library Book-cases; several Mahogany Bureaus, Desks, and Presses with Book-cases; two Mahogany Wardrobes, Commodes, Shaving Stands, Tea Stores and Coopers; eighteen Pier and Chimney Glasses; twelve Mirrors, Gerandoles and Carpets; several Four-pillar Bedsteads, Mahogany and Painted; Mahogany Book-case – Beds ... Fire Irons and Fenders; Bronze and other Figures; four large and two small Globes ... Library Ladders, Painted Drawers and Presses; Glass-cases with Birds and Flowers ... also a number of Fine Paintings; Two Pianos, two Harpsichords; and Electrifying Machine; with a great variety of other articles.<sup>66</sup>

From this remarkable list, certain items are worthy of note, including the pier and chimney glasses supplied by Richard Jackson of Essex Bridge (Appendix 3).<sup>67</sup> Ranging in price from £1 2s to £58, they were bought mainly between January 1797

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21 – *Edward Augustus Stratford (standing) with a younger man (perhaps John, later 3rd Earl), c.1745-50, attributed to Anthony Lee*

22 – *George, Prince of Wales, by J.C. Lochee, the only remaining sculpture from Lord Aldborough's collection (private collection)*

23 – *1st Countess of Aldborough, c.1740-50, attributed to John Lewis (courtesy Mrs Wingfield-Stratford-Orr)*



and August 1798 at a total cost of £132 19s 6d. There were enough pier and chimney glasses and mirrors for all the main reception rooms in the house, with some left over for the bedrooms. Other items worthy of note were the two pier tables supplied by the artist Gabriel Beranger, painted to resemble 'Oriental Agate', and two views of Dublin by William Ashford which cost £45 10s.<sup>68</sup> There can be no doubt that the house was habitable by the beginning of 1799, although the painting probably continued until the summer of 1801.

## LATER HISTORY

In August 1800 Lord Aldborough voted for the Act of Union with Britain, and in doing so inadvertently contributed towards the devaluation of his own property. The £15,000 he received for his vote in no way compensated him for a house which had cost in excess of £40,000 to build. Fortunately for him he did not live long enough to see the decline in house prices, for he died of a stroke at Belan on Friday, 2 January 1801. In his will, Lord Aldborough left all his disposable property to Lady Aldborough for life, appointing her sole executrix. On her death, Aldborough House, the London and Wicklow estates, and a £50,000 bond were to pass to Lord Aldborough's nephew, Col John Wingfield, who was to assume the additional surname of Stratford (Plate 24). Aldborough, contemplating that his widow might remarry, wrote in his will that 'I shall consider any children she may have ... as my own and appoint them as such taking the name and using the Armorial Bearings I use'.<sup>69</sup> This, no doubt, was a source of considerable anxiety to Col Wingfield who, as heir-at-law, stood to lose his entire inheritance if Lady Aldborough were to remarry and produce an heir. Unfortunately for him, 'The unhappy Amphitrite, now in weeds for her Lord promised at the end of the wretched period of her woe to mount again the triumphal car of Hymen.'<sup>70</sup>

In finding a new partner, Lady Aldborough had looked no further than her late husband's brother-in-law, friend and legal advisor, George C. Powell, barrister-at-law and commissioner of bankruptcy, Powell, of 8 Kildare Street in Dublin, had previously been married to Lord Aldborough's sister Lady Anne Stratford, who had died in July of 1800. Lady Aldborough's second marriage, which took place on Tuesday, 8 December 1801, ended abruptly with her death at Aldborough House on Wednesday, 14 July 1802. Powell, now in possession of the house, sought to contest her late husband's will which he had been instrumental in drawing up. In this he was joined by Lady Aldborough's brother John, Lord Henniker, who also sought the return of her £50,000 bond provided as dowry. The litigation that ensued was both complex and protracted.

24 – Col John Wingfield  
in the uniform of the  
Coldstream Guards, c.1802  
(courtesy Mrs Wingfield-  
Stratford-Orr)



Powell's most formidable adversary was Lord Aldborough's sister Amelia, Dowager Viscountess Powerscourt. The mother of the plaintiff, John Wingfield Stratford, she resided in Dublin, where she dealt with the legal affairs of her son in London. He was an idle, immature young man who, according to his mother, believed that 'pleasure, indolence and folly [were] the business of life'. Without her efforts on his behalf he would be no match for that 'troublesome, cunning fox', Powell. She was shrewd in her dealings with the legal profession, and wrote in less than flattering terms of them: 'The more I look ... the more I discover their tricks; they protract on purpose, and play into one another's hand, to get the Oyster and leave the shell for their Client.'<sup>71</sup> On 20 January 1803 she wrote:

I am doing every service I can for you here, and beg you not to compromise in any matter with Powell, who I think has behaved very improperly by you; 'tis said he is expected here next week and has order'd his bed to air'd at Ald. House; I hope you will take care that he takes nothing out of the House in Stratford Place...<sup>72</sup>

Powell, however, who wasted no time in laying claim to the London house, prevent-



ed Christie, the auctioneer, from evaluating its contents. By 3 November 1803 we learn that:

Powell is gone out of town with his (new) wife. I hear when he returns he intends going to Aldb. House. I was there the other Day and told all there I do not look on the house as his: I'm told he thinks he can bully you. I said he was mistaken; be assured he is a greedy mean fellow, etc; I wish your matters with him could be brought on speedily; I fear the Gentlemen of the Law want to partake in the inheritance.<sup>73</sup>

On at least one occasion Lady Powerscourt took advantage of Powell's absence to search the house for papers.

I have got two trunks full of papers from Aldb. House, but I dare say there is not one of any use to you, as the trunks are open and have been well cull'd; but it is a proof Lord A: never destroy'd old papers.<sup>74</sup>

Powell had every reason to destroy such papers, and no doubt it is largely due to Lady Powerscourt's efforts that so many survive. Powell continued to live at Aldborough House, employing James Hendrick to do stone and brick work for him there in 1804. On 9 September 1805 John Wingfield Stratford was appointed administrator of Lord Aldborough's estate, the previous executrix, Lady Aldborough, having died without either implementing her late husband's will or having made one of her own. Among other stipulations, he was compelled 'to make a true full and perfect inventory of all and singular of the Goods, Rights, Credits and Chattels of said deceased and return same into the registry of ... [the] Court of Prerogative on or before the last day of March 1806.'<sup>75</sup> By 18 November 1805 Lady Powerscourt wrote wearily:

I know too well the perplexity of Law, thro' all its stages: and feel for you most tenderly: the want of integrity, I sincerely regret, where it is so necessary, is so seldom found; but I trust God is for us and we will stand.<sup>76</sup>

The first hearing in chancery appears to have taken place in the Easter term of 1806. Unfortunately, the case did not end there but was followed by the first of several appeals on Powell's behalf. In the meantime, the creditors, who had waited almost a decade, were growing impatient, some even resorting to legal action. This prompted Lady Powerscourt to write, 'tis well for you, that I am well beloved here, it has saved your windows twice from being smash'd.'<sup>77</sup>

It is fortunate that an undated transcript of the final verdict survives, the case being heard before the Lord Chancellor of Ireland, Lord Manners. In his judgement he made reference to a case then proceeding in chancery in 1812, indicating that the

final verdict could not have been earlier than 1812, but also no later than 1813, as in November of that year the contents of the house were auctioned. In his verdict, there were two main issues to be settled. One was the bond for Lady Aldborough's £50,000 dowry, and the other was the deed conveying Aldborough House to her. As regards the bond, Lord Manners found that:

Lady Aldboro was most amply provided for [and that her husband's] intention in executing this bond was to secure his property against Lord Clare ... I cannot consider this Bond intended as a provision for Lady Aldboro and therefore must grant a perpetual injunction against proceeding at law for the recovery of the amount of it...<sup>78</sup>

As regards the deed, the question arose whether the house should pass to Lady Aldborough's personal representative George Powell or to John Wingfield Stratford, as it would under the will. Lord Manners decreed that, as in other respects, Lady Aldborough had 'taken under the will' (defending it when challenged and declaring that she would not make one of her own), the house must pass to John Wingfield Stratford.

Once legal matters were settled, John Wingfield Stratford auctioned the entire contents on 3 November 1813. On 15 December he leased the house to Professor von Feinaigle as a school, after which, in 1843, it became an army barracks. Around about 1850, the garden statuary, which had been located in a basement room for many years, was removed to McAnaspie's yard in Brunswick Street and thence dispersed.<sup>79</sup> This included perhaps the copy of the Apollo Belvedere, erected in December 1798, which once formed the focal point of the entrance front. Today, stripped of the last of its embellishments, Aldborough House is no more than a shadow of its former self.

## CONCLUSION

There remains a certain ambiguity regarding the precise role of the architect Richard Johnson. While his involvement is beyond doubt, the extent of it remains unclear. The most likely explanation is that Aldborough, 'studious of architecture's art divine', was instrumental in designing his own house, seeking professional advice where necessary to turn his rough sketches into working drawings. This would account for what Maurice Craig has described as 'the unhappily elongated piano nobile' and the 'astonishing top lit staircase hall', which he likened to a well-shaft. Despite its many shortcomings, the house as built is quite imposing and serves as fitting tribute to all those who built it under difficult circumstances. The following

satiric verse, published in 1825, perhaps serves as fitting comment on Lord Aldborough and the greatest of his many follies:

Where once the billows roared along the strand,  
Now, far from billows, spreads the thirsty land;  
There on a flat, in all the pride of taste,  
A pompous palace beautifies the waste;  
Without, an hundred mottos deck the walls,  
Within, daubs, shellwork, kick-knacks and glass-balls,  
Studious of architecture's art divine,  
Folly, Oh Stratford! Made this mansion thine!<sup>80</sup>

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25 – Aldborough House, entrance front, c.1912



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Deputy Keeper of the Record at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, and the board of the National Library of Ireland for permission to use material in their possession. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Royal Irish Academy, Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, National Gallery of Ireland, Irish Architectural Archive, Irish Labour History Society, Dublin City Archives, Gilbert Library, National Archives, Kings Inns Library, Registry of Deeds, the board of Trinity College Dublin, UCD library, and Howley Harrington Architects. I also wish to thank the following individuals for all their help: Alexis Guilbride, Loreto Coldaron, Teresa Moriarty, Frank Cruse, Dr Christine Casey, Dr Edward McParland, Dr Anthony Malcolmson, Dr Paul Caffery, Anne Martha Rowan, David Griffin, David Fuller, Simon Bradley, Jackie Moore, Mairéad Dunleavy, Tom Singleton, Ann-Marie Robinson, Michael Casey, Hon Desmond Guinness, Lord Henniker of Stratford-on-Slaney. Finally a special word of thanks to Prof Anne Crookshank, the Knight of Glin, and Mrs Wingfield-Stratford-Orr for their kindness and hospitality.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Mary Leadbeater, *Annals of Ballitore*, i, 167
- <sup>2</sup> Ashford witnessed his will in October 1800 and had painted several views for Aldborough from about 1780 onwards. Aldborough's diaries for 1792 and 1798 indicate that their relationship was not just professional. Likewise, Gainsborough's few surviving letters to the Hon Edward Stratford have an air of familiarity about them. On 21 March 1771 he wrote, 'if ever I am knighted or have anything to do at St James's it must be through your interest and singular friendship for me.' See M. Rosenthal, *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough* (London 1999) 290.
- <sup>3</sup> It was begun about 1785.
- <sup>4</sup> Edward McParland, *James Gandon, Vitruvius Hibernicus* (London 1985) 118.
- <sup>5</sup> Denys Forrest, *The Oriental: Life of a West End Club* (London 1968).
- <sup>6</sup> Copy of the Will of Edward, 2nd Earl of Aldborough, 5 Oct 1800, National Library of Ireland (NLI) Ms D 26,526.
- <sup>7</sup> The development of Stratford Place cost between £40,000 and £50,000 – see note 8 below. He also obtained a mortgage of £10,000 from his mother-in-law Mrs Ann Herbert, for which see Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/E/12.
- <sup>8</sup> The work of the English artist Francis Sartorius (1734-1804).
- <sup>9</sup> Arthur T. Bolton, 'Stratford Place', *RIBA Journal*, 1 April 1916, 180-85.
- <sup>10</sup> *Dublin Directory 1787* (Dublin) and *The Georgian Society Records of Eighteenth Century Domestic Architecture and Decoration in Dublin (GSR)*, 5 vols (Dublin 1909-13) i, 31. For legal reasons, 8 Great Denmark Street appears to have been signed over to his sister Lady Hannah Stratford in 1798. She was unmarried and lived with Lord Aldborough and his wife.
- <sup>11</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers D.2538/F/5.
- <sup>12</sup> NLI, Stratford Papers, Aldborough Diary, 1792, Ms 19,165.
- <sup>13</sup> Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin Under the Georges* (London 1936) 116-17.
- <sup>14</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/14, Accounts, 1793.
- <sup>15</sup> These have since disappeared due to replastering work in the nineteenth century, but are shown in a print of 1821.

- <sup>16</sup> The Apollo Belvedere, which is shown in a fanciful print of 1796, had a pedestal carved by the master mason Thomas Baker, and appears to have been erected on or by 20 December 1798.
- <sup>17</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/6.
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> I am grateful to Kenneth Severns for his quotation.
- <sup>20</sup> Irish Architectural Archive (IAA), Dublin, newspaper extracts, John Rodgers.
- <sup>21</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/E/12.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, D.2538/F/6.
- <sup>23</sup> *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, vol. xxxiv, 1991, 7.
- <sup>24</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/6.
- <sup>25</sup> Possibly George Ellis, Stone Cutter, 30 Mabbot Street, listed in the *Dublin Directory* in 1797 and 1798. Some of the statuary appears to have been executed on site, though most was probably of coade stone.
- <sup>26</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/7.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, D.2538/F/6.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, D.2538/F/1. Matthew Cogan had property in Cork which he intended to sell if he could get a lease from Lord Aldborough to build a house for his large family near the bridge at Baltinglass, for which see *ibid.*, D.2538/F/11/2.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, D.2538/F/11.
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, D.2538/F/14.
- <sup>33</sup> The interior of the theatre was entirely gutted due to renovations in the late 1980s.
- <sup>34</sup> A cross-section of it showing the gallery exists in the OPW Drawings Collection, National Archives (NA), Dublin, OPW 5HC/4/887.
- <sup>35</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield papers, D.2538/F/10.
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, D.2538/F/11.
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, D.2538/F/10.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, D.2538/F/11.
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.* See also Appendix 1.
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> For the case of *Clare v Aldborough*, see Ann C. Kavanagh, *John Fitzgibbon – Earl of Clare – Protestant Reaction and English Authority in Late Eighteenth Century Ireland* (Dublin 1997) 186-95.
- <sup>44</sup> PRONI, Aldborough Papers, T.3300/13/19/3.
- <sup>45</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/13.
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 26/9/1797.
- <sup>47</sup> Perhaps the Daniel Murphy listed as studying architecture at the Dublin Society Schools in 1793.
- <sup>48</sup> NLI, Stratford Papers, Aldborough Diary, 1798, Ms 19,165.
- <sup>49</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/10.
- <sup>50</sup> PRONI Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/15.
- <sup>51</sup> I am grateful to Prof Ann Crookshank for this reference.
- <sup>52</sup> Ann M. Stewart, *Irish Art Loan Exhibitions 1765-1927, Index of Artists, Vol. II, M-Z* (London

- 1995) 460.
- <sup>53</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, 14 March 1798, D.2538/C/IR.
- <sup>54</sup> NLI, Stratford Papers, Aldborough Diary, 1798, Ms 19,165.
- <sup>55</sup> Receipt from Eliza Burnet, payment in full 'For Wire Work of Bookcase in Library' £7.1.6, dated 23 December 1797, in PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/14.
- <sup>56</sup> NLI, Stratford Papers, Aldborough Diary, 1798, Ms 19,165.
- <sup>57</sup> W.G. Strickland, *Dictionary of Irish Artists*, 2 vols (Dublin 1913) ii.
- <sup>58</sup> The work of Thomas Baker, who also worked on the Custom House, the conversion of Parliament House, the first-floor windows of the terraces of houses on Westmoreland Street, Carlisle Bridge, Nelson's Pillar, the GPO and Mountjoy Square.
- <sup>59</sup> NLI, Stratford Papers, Aldborough Diary, 1798, Ms 19,165.
- <sup>60</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/15.
- <sup>61</sup> Ann Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, *Painters of Ireland* (London 1978) 170-2.
- <sup>62</sup> NLI, Stratford Papers, Aldborough Diary, 1798, Ms 19,165.
- <sup>63</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/14.
- <sup>64</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>65</sup> NLI, Stratford Papers, Aldborough Diary, 1798, Ms 19,165 for Zafforini. It is possible that it was for this room that Aldborough acquired 'nine pieces of [white] damask', each 18 yards long, used to make 'Ventian window curtains [with] 7 breadths in each 4 YDS high', as well as covering twenty-four chairs and four sofas (PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/14)
- <sup>66</sup> *Carricks Daily Advertiser*, Tuesday, 2 November 1813.
- <sup>67</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/15.
- <sup>68</sup> NLI, Stratford Papers, Aldborough Diary, 1798, Ms 19,165. Items listed include: 20 February, 'Seascape by Ashford', 14 March, 'Four Watercolor Land and Sea Views' ... 3 April, '4 Landscapes on Canvas ... 2 Figures and Drawing', 2 September, 'A Beautiful Optic Deception', painted on glass by Beranger, 24 September 'Two Fruit Pieces', 1 October, 'Painting of the Bridge to the Upr Lake at Killarney', 19 October, A Painting of 'Pharsalia and Achilles Triumph over Hector and Lyrnessus'. A large number of prints were also used to decorate the house with borders supplied by Joseph Wright of 33 Mary's Abbey. An undated bill for carriage refers to the following items: '1 Column Chemney Piece ... 1 Grecian Venus, 1 Cupid, 1 Mars, 1 Antinous ... 1 Shaperdess, 1 Dutch Group, 1 Lyon, 1 Bear, 1 Group Antinous and Hercules' (PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/14). See also appendices II, III.
- <sup>69</sup> NLI, Stratford Papers, Copy of Aldborough's Will, 1800, Ms. 26,526.
- <sup>70</sup> Crookshank and Glin, *Painters of Ireland*, 170-72.
- <sup>71</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/E/37.
- <sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, 20.1.1803.
- <sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 3.11.1803.
- <sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 27.3 (n.d.).
- <sup>75</sup> Administration of Will of Edward, Earl of Aldborough, NLI, Ms. D.26.526.
- <sup>76</sup> PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, 16.8.[1812-13?], D.2538/E/37.
- <sup>77</sup> *ibid.* (n.d.).
- <sup>78</sup> *ibid.* (n.d.), D.2538/E/36.
- <sup>79</sup> *Irish Builder*, 15 November 1882, 336.
- <sup>80</sup> J.N. Brewer, *The Beauties of Ireland*, 2 vols (1825) i, 47.

APPENDIX I: PETER BOSSI'S ESTIMATE FOR STUCCO WORK  
(PRONI, Verner-Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/14)

To the Right Hon. The Earl of Aldborough  
Estimate of Plaistering and Stucco Work

Workmanship  
by Peter Bossi

Coated and floated Ceilings Best Manner	7 <sup>d</sup> p <sup>r</sup> yard
Coated + D <sup>o</sup> Partitions	6 p <sup>r</sup> D <sup>o</sup>
Coated + D <sup>o</sup> Walls	47 <sup>2</sup> p <sup>r</sup> d <sup>o</sup>
Plain Cornices p <sup>r</sup> Running foot	7
Dubbing for D <sup>o</sup> p <sup>r</sup> D <sup>o</sup>	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
Small Mouldings/Circular p <sup>r</sup> foot	4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
Staffs Opened with Quirks p <sup>r</sup> D <sup>o</sup>	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
Circular Opened with D <sup>o</sup>	2
Bedding Sash Frames on a Verge	9
Plaistering the [ ] Windows p <sup>r</sup> foot	2
Rendering p <sup>r</sup> Yard	2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>

Any Ornaments Either in Ceiling Walls Mouldings etc. that is to be done to be charged According as may be Agreed on.

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APPENDIX II: ROBERT HULBERT'S BILL FOR GILDING, & ACCOMPANYING NOTE  
(PRONI, Verner Wingfield Papers, D.2538/F/14)

Earl of Aldborough

March 7th 1799

To Robert Hulbert

D<sup>r</sup>

To Gilding & white and Gold	£	s	d
Frame in the Library at Aldborough House	1	2	9

Mr. Murphy You know I agreed to do it in the manner you mentioned first for one Guinea but after you desired mee to doo it in the manner it is now which is above double the Quantity of Gilding on it. I prepared it which you know took me a deale of time and Gilt it all but One Short End what I demand wont anney thing like Clear mee I shall Send on Saturday Night.

Yours with

Respect Robt. Hulbert

APPENDIX III. RICHARD JACKSON'S BILL FOR SUPPLIES TO LORD ALDBOROUGH  
(PRONI, Verner Winfield Papers D.2538/F/14)

The Representative of the late Earl of Aldborough Due to Richd Jackson.

1793	Nov. 7	Four plates of looking Glass 7/6 Packing Case for D <sup>o</sup>	£1.10.- 1.1
1797	Jan 20	A carriage Glass	1.2.-
	Mar 11	A plain gilt Cimy Glass A gilt over Glass <u>large</u> A Ditto <u>smaller</u>	3.6.- 3.19.7 3.9.6
	Sep 27	Six plates looking Glass @ 18/- Six D <sup>o</sup> @ 14/6 Four D <sup>o</sup> @ 14/6	5.8.- 4.7.- 2.18.-
	Oct 10	Removing large paintings peir Glases oval D <sup>o</sup> and gerandoles to Aldboro House	.7.-
1798	Jan 20	A large Chemney Glass w <sup>th</sup> Ornam <sup>t</sup> + arms for 4 Candles Four plates looking Glass for Bookcase Doors – 24/-	18.10.- 4.16.-
	[Jan] 22	Painting [?] + partially gilding a frame with Carved Horses + a glass for it –	.17.6
	Mar 10	A large peir Glass. White Fr <sup>e</sup> and gold Ornaments	58.-.-
	July 26	Six plates looking Glass for window shutters Musick Room Am <sup>t</sup> Carried forward	4.7.- £112.18.82
1798		Amount bro <sup>t</sup> forward	£112.18.82
	Aug 17	Two plates looking Glass – Two unsilvered plates of Glass cut circular one side for Tables	10.10 2.4.-
	[Aug] 31	A plain gilt oval Glass w <sup>th</sup> an Iron hook for a Lustre New gilding the Frame for another – the match – A gilt Frame for two old plates of Glass New gilding an old frame same size + pattern A gilt Chimney Frame for an old plate two end Glasses provided – old plate new [?] – Cirular room A Chimney Frame smaller done in like manner for small front Room –	3.16.- .7.6 1.9.6 .15.6 5.15.- 5.2.6
			£132.19.62
		By a Bill for –	41.-.-
			£91.19.62