1 – Wallpaper from Lady Kildare's Room at Castletown House
(courtesy Castletown Foundation)

Flocks, flowers and follies: some recently discovered Irish wallpapers of the eighteenth century

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Despite the survival of a number of wallpapers from around 1780 onwards in Irish houses, until now very few examples of early to mid-eighteenth-century papers have been found, while physical evidence of early furnishing textile usage in Ireland is still more scant. With one notable exception – the opulent gilt leather hangings of around 1730, still in the saloon of Loreto Abbey, Rathfarnham, Dublin – our knowledge of Irish interior decoration in the early eighteenth century has been restricted to stucco work, surviving panelled interiors, or contemporary written references to less permanent materials.[1] Expensive, movable tapestry hangings have survived from the period, but not the less permanent weaves used for hangings and curtains, such as the crimson mohair curtains ordered by Mrs Delany for Delville, her Dublin home, in 1744, or the crimson damask used in her bedchamber.[2] Elaborate papered schemes like the print room at Castletown or the Chinese room at Carton both in county Kildare have survived from the 1750s and 1760s, but not the simpler patterned wallpapers which begin to be described in Dublin newspaper advertisements in the late 1730s.[3] Recent conservation work in four Irish houses of the early eighteenth century (Castletown, county Kildare, Belvedere, county Westmeath, Bellamont Forest, county Cavan, and No. 10 Henrietta Street, Dublin) has resulted in the discovery of a number of wallpapers and one textile wallcovering from the period when the use of wallpaper was starting to be widely adopted in Irish houses. Seen in context, these discoveries throw new light onto how wallpapers and textiles were incorporated into interior schemes.

Three floral wallpapers found in Castletown, Bellamont Forest and 10 Henrietta Street show stylistic and technical similarities which suggest that they may have originated in the same Dublin workshop in the second quarter of the cen-

tury. Unusually, all three papers are printed onto ungrounded paper – that is to say, paper which has not been given any base colour – a feature which does not appear to have any equivalent in contemporary English or European practice and may be indicative of a local industry at an early and technically unadvanced stage. In each case the outline of the pattern is block-printed in black, and the colours added somewhat crudely by stencil.

The paper found in Lady Kildare's Room at Castletown (Plate 1) is identical to that found in the ante-room at Henrietta Street, and both papers were clearly printed from the same block. The pattern of small flowers and leaves on trailing stems is set against an all-over, imbricated background pattern of pin-dots, probably intended to represent quilting in black-stitch. Wallpapers made 'in imitation of Tapestry or Needlework, fit for hanging of Rooms' were advertised by Dublin paper-stainers Bernard and James Messink of Blind Quay in 1746,[4] while similar examples found in England date from the first decade of the century.[5] The Henrietta Street example was used with an unusual fretted border, printed in black, blue and yellow, very similar in style to that used with the paper found at Bellamont Forest (Plate 2). Technically similar to the first two papers, the Bellamont paper has a pattern of trailing stems of flowers and foliage combined with gardening implements and baskets, but without the pin-dot ground.

In all three cases, the papers were the earliest in a sequence of wallpapers found at that location, with no traces of earlier decoration beneath them. The Castletown example was applied to a stretched hessian lining in a cupboard in Lady Kildare's room, beneath three layers of later papers. In Henrietta Street the paper was found in the ante-room, a first-floor room created out of the original 1730s stairwell of the house some time between 1761 and 1772, when a new stairway was constructed at the back of the house. The fragments of wallpaper were attached to pieces of oak recycled from an apartment – possibly a bedroom or boudoir – destroyed when the new staircase was built, and used to line the walls of the ante-room. In Bellamont Forest the paper was found beneath a later Georgian paper, both of which predate the fire which damaged part of the house in the 1770s. It seems by no means unlikely that these papers and borders are the work of a Dublin paper-stainer of the 1740s, possibly James or Bernard Messink, or else John Russell, whose name first appears in 1737.[6]

From the above it is clear that wallpapers were used in private rooms in Ireland early on in the eighteenth century. In No. 10 Henrietta Street, significant evidence relating to the use of wallpapers and textile hangings in formal, public rooms has come to light, broadening our knowledge of the variety and hierarchy of materials used in the early to middle part of the century. The survival of extensive evidence of the earliest decoration of the first-floor rooms in 10 Henrietta Street is due

to changes in taste which occurred around 1770 towards a plainer, less ornamented style of decor. Built around 1730 for the first Luke Gardiner, possibly designed by Sir Edward Lovett Pearce, the house underwent some remodelling by his son Charles Gardiner from around 1755, and was further altered and extensively redecorated when Luke Gardiner the Younger inherited it in 1769. Some time after Luke the Younger moved into the house in 1772, the outmoded wainscoting in the four principal first-floor rooms was lined from the dado to the cornice with stretched hessian and paper to provide a flat finish, preserving earlier decorative material intact beneath the hessian. Most of this hessian was taken down in the 1960s and replaced with sheets of hardboard, and it was when this hardboard was removed in the course of recent conservation that the original oak panelling and early wallpaper and textile fragments, hidden since the 1770s, were revealed. In the Yellow and Blue drawing rooms (the names come from a 1772 inventory),[7] the walls above the chair rail were finished partly in fielded panels of polished oak, partly in rough oak planks laid horizontally to form a flat surface.[8] The areas of rough timber had originally been covered with paper or textile hangings, some of which have remained in place. In the Blue Drawing Room, extensive amounts of blue flock wallpaper with a small geometric pattern were found (Plate 3), while in the Yellow Drawing Room, fragments of yellow woollen material were discovered, together with remains of a battening system used to attach fabric. The walls of the ballroom – an addition of the 1750s or 1760s – were treated the same way, but using pine painted pale grey, instead of polished oak. No conclusive evidence of the original hangings in the ballroom survives, although traces of a plain crimson flock paper may indicate the earliest scheme. This division of wall space into areas of panelling and hangings is not unique to Henrietta Street. In Castletown House, Louisa Connolly's bedroom on the first floor, although altered in some ways since the 1720s, also combines areas of fielded pine panelling painted pale grey, with a large area of rough pine sheeting intended for hangings. A tiny fragment of green flock paper and larger fragments of block-printed and hand-coloured 'tree of life' pattern wallpaper found in Louisa Connolly's bedroom both date from the eighteenth century, and indicate the type of hangings used in conjunction with the painted panelling (Plate 4).

In No. 10 Henrietta Street, the fashionable remodelling of the rooms to provide plain surfaces undertaken in the 1770s is reflected in contemporary advertisements such as that of Michael Boylan of Grafton Street in 1777, advertising 'Plain Papers now so much used in London and Dublin', and listing some of the more popular colours in use, including 'Pea Green, verditer, Blue, Peach ... Queen's Brown, Hair Stone, lemon'.[9] Between the early 1770s and 1829 the walls of all four first floor rooms at 10 Henrietta Street were decorated in a succession of schemes using plain blue or green verditer distemper. Initially, the plain-coloured walls were

2 – Wallpaper from Bellamont Forest, county Cavan
(courtesy John Coote)

3 – Blue flock paper at No. 10 Henrietta Street, Dublin
(photo Andrew Smith)

4 – Fragments of 'Tree of Life' wallpaper from Louisa Connolly's bedroom at Castletown House
(courtesy Castletown Foundation)

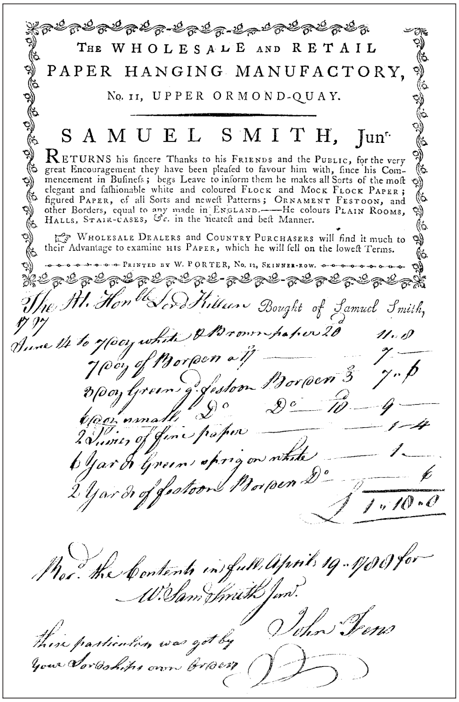
relieved with narrow block-printed paper borders, while the later schemes were finished with elaborate, multicoloured flock borders, fragments of which survive, and which probably date from the time of Charles John Gardiner, 2nd Viscount Mountjoy, who lived in the house from 1798 to 1829. The geometric flock paper in the Blue Drawing Room clearly precedes these schemes, and therefore dates from the time of the first Luke Gardiner, or possibly that of his son Charles Gardiner who lived there from 1755 to 1769. Precisely how old the paper is impossible to determine. Pigment analysis of the ground colour indicates that Prussian blue was used, a pigment which was first advertised in 1710 and in widespread use by the mid-1730s. Historically, the very early use of flock paper in Dublin is indicated by the existence of the example in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham,[10] and by Dublin newspaper advertisements of the 1740s advertising flocked papers.[11] The coarse quality of the paper in the Blue Drawing Room, and a certain lack of sophistication in the way it is applied to the wall, also support an early date, as does the absence of any evidence of an earlier scheme.

The fragment of yellow cloth found in the Yellow Drawing Room of No. 10 Henrietta Street is of some interest, given how rare it is to find early furnishing textiles *in situ*. As in the Blue Drawing Room, the walls were divided into areas of fielded panelling and areas of rough oak planks, although it appears that the Yellow Drawing Room was the more important of the two apartments, being larger in area and having more elaborate doorcases. The piece found was around two inches wide and approximately five feet long, and was formed from three widths sewn together.[12] It looks like a piece cut from the top or bottom of a large panel, intended for use as a curtain or a wall hanging. The strip of cloth had been nailed across a gap in the rough oak sheeting lining the wall, presumably as a preparatory measure in order to prevent the passage of air and dust through the gap from soiling the wall hangings. Evidence of the battening system used to attach the hangings was also found, but as only a few yellow threads were attached, it is impossible to be absolutely certain that the strip of cloth nailed to the wall was the same as that used for the hangings themselves. The woollen cloth is of a type known as 'harateen' or 'moreen', commonly used for furnishing in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and mentioned frequently in inventories. It was made with a worsted warp and a thicker worsted weft to form horizontal ribs, then finished by watering and stamping with a vermicular pattern. Authorities differ as to its former social standing. While in later years their use seems to have moved down market, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries worsted materials similar to harateen were evidently used as wall hangings in the smartest rooms, along with silks.[13] In Temple Newsam in the 1730s, on the other hand, chairs covered in more expensive material had their backs covered in harateen,[14] while moreens are frequently mentioned as curtains and bed

curtains in colonial American homes or in housekeepers' rooms in English houses. Its presence in the Yellow Drawing Room is thus slightly enigmatic: were the walls actually hung with yellow harateen, or was this merely a draught-proofing strip recycled from a humbler part of the house as a preparation for a more expensive textile?[15] Whatever its true role, it seems that the harateen was probably manufactured in Ireland, as an advertisement placed in the *Dublin Daily Advertiser* of 1736 by Edward Wale 'of the Black Swan in High Street' makes clear. Wale states plainly that he 'makes and sells all kinds of Kidderminster, Parragons, Herrattens, and Cheney for Houshold Furniture'.[16]

The wallpaper found at Belvedere, county Westmeath, is perhaps the most interesting on a number of counts (Plate 5). A large and well-preserved section of this paper was found during recent conservation work when a partition was removed from one of the two bedrooms of the house, which was designed by Richard Castle for George Rochfort, Lord Belfield and later Earl of Belvedere, in 1740. The paper's manufacturer, a Mr Smith, incorporated his name into the design (Plate 6), thus giving us the first known link between a recorded Irish paper-stainer and a surviving example of work.[17] A 'Samuel Smith, paper-stamper' of Upper Ormond Quay is listed in the *Dublin Directory* of 1778, while his descendants appear to have carried on the business at that address, and later in Nassau Street and Capel Street, until the 1830s (Plate 7).[18] This exuberant pattern presents a profusion of birds, trees, fruit, flowers, architectural elements and follies, arranged with cheerful disregard to proportion, and which seems to echo so closely the spirit of Rococo fantasy of the house and its folly-strewn demesne that it is hard to believe that the paper was not chosen or commissioned by the 1st Earl himself. Nevertheless, as is so often the case without corroborative documentary or architectural evidence, it is frustratingly difficult to date the paper with any accuracy. Rochfort died in 1774, four years before Samuel Smith's first listing, so Smith would have had to have been in business some years prior to his first recorded mention if the paper were to have been made by him during the Earl's lifetime. It may be that the paper was printed by an earlier 'Smith' of whom no record survives. Like the early floral papers described above, the Belvedere paper is printed on ungrounded paper, the outlines block-printed in black with the colours added by stencil or additional blocks. While this technique might suggest a date in the 1740s or 1750s, aspects of the draughtsmanship point to a later date. The arrangement and treatment of the flowers is quite similar to English printed linen and cotton designs of the 1770s,[19] while the general style, and the handling of the trees in particular, recall plate-printed Irish toile designs of the 1770s to 1780s. A date after the 1st Earl's death cannot be ruled out.

In the manner of printing, the 'Smith' paper may provide evidence of a unique aspect of the Dublin printing industry in the eighteenth century, noted by



THE WHOLESALE AND RETAIL
PAPER HANGING MANUFACTORY,
No. 11, UPPER ORMOND-QUAY.

SAMUEL SMITH, Jun^r.

RETURNS his ſincere Thanks to his FRIENDS and the PUBLIC, for the very great Encouragement they have been pleaſed to favour him with, ſince his Commencement in Buſineſs; begs Leave to inform them he makes all Sorts of the moſt elegant and faſhionable white and coloured FLOCK and MOCK FLOCK PAPER; figured PAPER, of all Sorts and neweſt Patterns; ORNAMENT FESTOON, and other Borders, equal to any made in ENGLAND.——He colours PLAIN ROOMS, HALLS, STAIR-CASES, &c. in the neateſt and beſt Manner.

☞ WHOLESALE DEALERS and COUNTRY PURCHASERS will find it much to their Advantage to examine HIS PAPER, which he will ſell on the loweſt Terms.

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1777
June 14 to 7 Pcs white & Brown paper 2d — 11.8
7 Pcs of Borders a 1/ — 7.—
3 Pcs Green g. festoon Borders 3 — 7.6
6 Pcs small D^o D^o 10 — 4.—
2 Quires of fine paper — 1.4
6 Yards Green sprig on white — 1.—
2 Yards of festoon Borders D^o — 6
£ 1.10.0

Rec^d. the Contents in full April 19. 1780 for
W. Sam^l Smith Jun^r.
John Fenn
these particulars was got by
Your Lordships own Orders

Ada Longfield. Whereas in England and France textile and paper printing were carried on quite separately, in some Dublin factories they were carried on side by side, as, for example, that of Thomas Ashworth of Donnybrook, who described himself in a petition for parliamentary aid of 1755 as a 'Linen, Cotton, Callicoe and Paper Printer'.[20] The 'Smith' paper from Belvedere unites aspects of both technologies in that the colours are applied in transparent glazes from light to dark, rather than in opaque layers from dark to light, as was the general practice in wallpaper printing. Some of the glazes are combined to produce secondary shades. This technique, the unusual width of the paper, and the scale of the design all suggest contemporary fabric printing practice as applied to block-printed cottons and linens.[21]

Before leaving the subject of the Belvedere paper, it might be relevant to touch on the question of design and authorship in the Dublin wallpaper industry. A survey of the advertisements recorded by Mrs Leask shows clearly that the principal source of designs for Dublin paper-stainers was London. There was of course no copyright protection at the time, and at the start of each season the wallpaper makers of Dublin would travel to London, returning with examples of the latest patterns, which would quickly be copied and advertised for sale. Extravagant claims for the quality, fashionability, and cheapness of the product recur constantly in the advertisements, but the notion of originality of design simply does not feature.[22] The Belvedere paper is one of only three eighteenth-century Irish fabric or wallpaper designs whose authorship is known, the other two being the 'Volunteer furniture' printed by Edward Clarke at Palmerstown in 1783, and the linen union toile printed by Robinson of Ballsbridge during the 1770s or 1780s.[23] These three designs stand out from the generality of anonymous and more conventional designs by virtue of certain shared characteristics. These may perhaps be described as cheerful whimsicality, a two-dimensional, flattened perspective, and an almost cartoon-like manner of drawing. Based on English or French models, they have a distinct local flavour, and it is these few appealingly unrefined compositions (pending further discoveries) that constitute what might be called an Irish school of pattern design.[24]

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opposite

5 – 'Smith' wallpaper, Belvedere, county Westmeath

6 – Close-up of 'Smith' paper showing urn and 'Smith' inscription

7 – Samuel Smith, billhead (courtesy NLI)

ENDNOTES

[1] For a description of the leather hangings at Loreto Abbey, see J. Cornforth, 'Aglow with Golden Leather', *Country Life*, 26 November 1987, 62. It is John Cornforth's view that this is the only set of early eighteenth-century leather hangings still in their original location in the British Isles.

[2] A. Day (ed.), *Letters from Georgian Ireland* (Belfast 1991).

[3] Documentary references to the activities of Dublin paper-stainers in the eighteenth century were extensively researched and published by the late Ada Longfield (Mrs H. Leask). Virtually all the references to newspaper advertisements quoted in this article are from her 'History of the Dublin Wallpaper Industry in the 18th Century', *JRSAI*, lxxvii, 1947.

[4] Advertisement in *Pue's Occurrences*, 17 June 1746, cited in Longfield, 'History of the Dublin Wallpaper Industry in the 18th Century', 107.

[5] A. Wells-Cole, 'Flocks, Florals and Fancies' in L. Hoskins (ed.), *The Papered Wall* (London 1994) 35. A paper found in the 'Ancient House' in Stafford with a similar pin-dot ground pattern is dated 1700-1710.

[6] An intriguing link between the three papers is that each of the three houses in which they were found is associated with Sir Edward Lovett Pearce. The coincidence may probably be ascribed more to the small number of paper-stainers active in Dublin at the time, however, than to the patronage of a particular manufacturer by the leading architect of the day.

[7] National Library of Ireland, Gardiner Papers, Henrietta Street Inventory; PC11(6). The inventory was taken in 1772 when Luke Gardiner the Younger returned from the Grand Tour and took possession of the property. The names given to the rooms are of interest in that they suggest the use of each room at the time, and even the colour scheme. The inventory also lists the pictures hanging in each room. See also J. Coleman, 'Luke Gardiner, an Irish Dilletante', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 15 (Dublin 1999) 160-9.

[8] Paint scrapes indicated that all the visible interior woodwork, doors, dado panelling, shutters, etc. were of polished oak.

[9] Advertisement in *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 5 April 1777, quoted in Longfield, 'History of the Dublin Wallpaper Industry in the 18th Century'.

[10] D. Skinner, 'Irish Period Wallpapers', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 13 (Dublin 1997) 52-61.

[11] John Russell 'at the Indian Woman in Bride Street, Paper-Stainer' is recorded as early as 1737, advertising papers both 'flocked and plain' in the 1740s, while James and Bernard Messink of the Blind Quay made wallpapers 'in imitation of Coffoy' – a term used to describe figured woollen velvet.

[12] Each width was woven to a width of 24 and a half inches.

[13] P. Thornton, *Authentic Decor; London* (1993) 56-8.

[14] *ibid*.

[15] In a letter to the author, Mr John Cornforth states that woollen cloths come far down the hierarchy of materials, and that he would be surprised to find moreen or harateen used in a drawing room of the period. However, he also suggests that Dublin or Irish interiors may have been less 'stratified' than those in London. He also points out that in the recently refitted English Rooms at the Victoria & Albert Museum, the walls of the drawing room from (London's) Henrietta Street have been hung with glazed, plain blue mohair. The effect of this would have been very similar to that of the harateen in No. 10 Henrietta Street, Dublin, which, with its impressed pat-

tern, would have been, if anything, more decorative.

[16] *Dublin Daily Advertiser*, 19 October 1736. Advertisements placed by other woollen manufacturers in the same year indicate the wide range of fashionable furnishing and dress woollens available, all – as one advertiser put it – 'of Irish Matter and Make'.

[17] In a similar fashion, the manufacturer of the plate-printed Irish toile of the 1770s or 1780s in the National Museum of Ireland incorporated his name ('Robinson Balls Bridge') into the design.

[18] National Library of Ireland MS 8,037(1). A billhead of Samuel Smith Junior lists wallpapers and borders supplied to Lord Killeen, possibly in 1797, although the date is indistinct.

[19] See in particular the block-printed linen in the Victoria & Albert Museum, T.227-1931, illustrated in W. Hefford, *The Victoria and Albert Museum's textile Collection: Design for Printed Textiles in England from 1750 to 1850* (London 1992) 63.

[20] *Journals of the Irish House of Commons*, v, 1 Nov 1755, cited in Longfield, 'History of the Dublin Wallpaper Industry'.

[21] The pattern is printed onto sheets measuring 26 inches across by 21 inches up and down. The vertical repeat of the pattern is 42 inches, thus half of each repeat could be printed onto one sheet of paper. This is entirely counter to normal practice at the time. Wallpapers in England and Ireland were almost universally printed onto 21-inch-wide paper, the sheets being joined together into rolls before printing.

[22] This reliance on London fashions as models of taste has been borne out by the discovery of several wallpapers printed in Dublin which are identical, with very minor variations, to examples located in English houses. The flock paper of around 1700 in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, the 1820s Gothic paper from the library at Malahide Castle, and a floral paper of the 1760s from Eustace Street, Dublin, all have equivalents in England. I am indebted to Mr Robert Weston of Hamilton Weston Wallpapers for drawing my attention to the English examples of the last two.

[23] The most talented Irish designer of the time, William Kilburn, left Dublin soon after completing his apprenticeship for England, where he rapidly achieved success and rose to the top of his profession.

[24] Similarities between the treatment of the trees in the Volunteer furniture and the work of the French topographical artist Gabriel Beranger have led to suggestions that he may have been involved in the design, although there is no documentary evidence to support this view.

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