

when Archbishop Charles Cobbe had first occupied the house. Perhaps surprisingly, the portraits and pictures were not recorded. This and the early nineteenth-century inventory of Mount Stewart, county Down, describe items, such as curtains and furniture, in more detail than earlier lists. For example in Mount Stewart's Pink Bedroom, there was a 'Chevaux-de-Frise Cornish and Valences printed cotton furniture and drapery, lined with pink silk worsted fringe and tassels'.

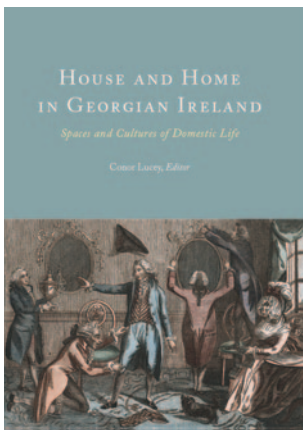
The book is dedicated to that great authority on Irish furniture and objets d'art, the late Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin. His encouragement and that of the Irish and British organisations established to foster interest in Ireland's architecture and material culture are all acknowledged in influencing and helping to produce this book. Taken together, these inventories demonstrate how the Irish landed elite furnished and decorated their houses. Much like the living arrangements, contents were distributed according to their function and expense. Equally they point to absences. In many cases portraits and books are not recorded, even in a cursory way. Similarly, as Toby Barnard highlights in his foreword, it is difficult to find regional variations. The one exception, perhaps, are the fifteen Londonderry solar grates found in Mount Stewart in 1821, the invention of the Earl of Londonderry. One of the things that make this volume incredibly useful is the detailed, thematic index that draws each object together, allowing for comparison across the houses. There can be no doubt that *Great Irish households* will be a stimulus to further study. Indeed, there is still much to be done not only within the Irish and British contexts, but also with the great houses across Europe, which might situate what was happening in Ireland within a broader framework.

Conor Lucey (ed.)

## HOUSE AND HOME IN GEORGIAN IRELAND: SPACES AND CULTURES OF DOMESTIC LIFE

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review by William Laffan



NEITHER LE CORBUSIER'S DEFINITION OF THE HOUSE as a 'machine for living' NOR Maeve Brennan's designation of the home as a 'place in the mind' (Brennan's childhood home in Ranelagh haunts her fiction) is unproblematic. Nevertheless, taken together they rather neatly bookend a field of historical research into the domestic sphere that has proved particularly fertile in recent years. On the one hand, studies of interior architecture have prioritised function over the formal concerns that had long dominated scholarship, though, of course, acknowledging the fundamental link between the two. On the other, much recent research has explored the meaning, emotive

A PAIR OF EXQUISITES REGALING  
by unknown artist



resonance and semiotics of the domicile, in an attempt to somehow codify the elusive qualities that in *Mrs Miniver* (that paean to the everyday) Jan Struther identified as comprising the very essence of home: 'not the size of the rooms or the colour of the walls, but the feel of the door-handles and light-switches, the shape and texture of the banister-rail under one's palm; minute tactual intimacies'. The practicalities of how lives are lived within a building and the emotional effect of lives remembered – or imagined – would seem to lie at opposing ends of any spectrum, however, sometimes the most interesting insights can be found at the unlikely intersection of the two. Citing the pioneering work of scholars including Amanda Vickery, Bernard Herman and Karen Lipsedge, Conor Lucey, editor of this handsomely-produced series of essays, states in the introduction the volume's aim as presenting 'an Irish analogue' to this burgeoning international scholarship and the essays that follow explore 'the different uses and qualities of domestic spaces in Georgian Ireland'.

If, as Lucey notes, the essays, are 'forged principally in the disciplines of architectural and design history' they complement and, on occasion, engage with 'anthropology and auto-ethnography, cultural geography and literary memoir'. Themes explored range from 'politeness, leisure and lifecycle' to 'gender, consumption and performativity'. Acknowledging a 'dichotomy between how houses were designed' and the often less tidy reality of how lives were lived, the volume casts its net widely in terms of both building typology and the social class of its occupiers. In addition to the Georgian town house, country house and castle, the essays scrutinise the 'little understood' world of rented

rooms and the cabins of the rural poor. Room usage and arrangement could often be mutable to match the dynamic demands of life and meet changing aspirations as to how it could best be lived. The competing desire for seclusion and sociability is a topic frequently addressed – and it applied across all classes. Lodgings often ‘collapsed formal divisions between social and private domestic spaces’; Melanie Hayes writing of the great houses of Henrietta Street notes the tension between ‘domestic comfort and formal display’; Claudia Kinmonth, describing the one- or two-roomed homes of labourers addresses the duality of ‘communality and privacy’. Meanwhile Aisling Durkan elegantly explores the ‘fluidity of function’ in the merchant houses of eighteenth-century Drogheda – not infrequently in multiple occupancy – whose ‘inhabitants adapted and negotiated spaces to meet their needs’.

Questions of gender pervade the discussion. This is unsurprisingly the case in Emma O’Toole’s important contribution on ‘the spaces and material culture of the lying-in’, which shows how for a period of a few weeks the bedroom chamber was transformed into a lying-in room in preparation for birth and ‘transitioned from a very private space ... to a public one that welcomed visiting guests’. Female agency is so often lost from the historical record but instances recorded by chance remind that it permeated all aspects of the household economy. Luke Gardiner’s picture hang was disrupted by his offspring’s obduracy: ‘I find that the lady that I had intended to put in that room, my daughter will not suffer to be removed’. Priscilla Sonnier shows how Lady Elizabeth Aylmer and her close friend Lady Elizabeth Caldwell together shaped the redesign of Donadea Castle, county Kildare, with their correspondence revealing how women ‘visualized the aesthetics and experiences within their domestic spaces’. Elsewhere Toby Barnard in an original contribution to the use of ceramics in the Irish home notes the fluidity of decision making both at home – ‘rigid conventions about gender roles in running a household were liable to break down in practice’ – but also in the wider marketplace for goods. He raises the conundrum of who shifted taste and consumption, was it ‘the manufacturer, an intermediate agent, or the trend-setting consumer’?

Practical factors – the quest for comfort, the provision of storage and the desire for optimal communication between rooms – impacted on architectural decision-making. How best to render a home childproof is a subject which perhaps has not been explored sufficiently by architectural historians, but was, and is, of foremost concern to solicitous parents. The half door of the humble Irish cabin served as a child gate, ‘a functional barrier between small children and animals’, while at Donadea an impressive space at the top of the great stairs was sacrificed for safety reasons due to the propensity of the boys of the house for sliding down the bannisters. Describing Lady Aylmer’s anxiety in this regard, Sonnier writes nicely of ‘the nuanced and maternal “poetics of space” within the domestic ambit’ of the externally rebarbative castle. Broader questions of fashion, modes of hospitality and aspirations to – but also changing concepts of – gentility also determined layouts. In a sparkling discussion of the post-Union Irish castle, Judith Hill notes how ‘the prioritizing of sensibility and spontaneity in the later eighteenth century translated into a taste for asymmetry in house design and informality in furnishing and social interactions’ but she acknowledges the paradox that at Charleville Castle in Offaly – as indeed at Donadea – the embrace of informality adhered ‘to a grandeur that was intended to impress, even intimidate’.

One of the great strengths of the book is the consistently subtle use of a wide variety of source material to reveal hidden histories. Quite simply, many of the topics explored here were not the subject of straightforward written accounts and hence need to be teased out by suggestion and inference. A 1772 inventory, treated with appropriate caution as it is a retrospective document, is used by Melanie Hayes in her discussion of the ‘fashioning, fit out and functionality’ of the aristocratic town house and specifically No. 10 Henrietta Street. If its description of the Yellow Drawing Room with its ‘large pier glass in a white carved frame’ laconically evokes lost splendours, Hayes goes on to address the more fundamental issue of ‘what meaning ... individuals attach[ed] to their material possessions’. Elsewhere authors deploy, costumes, caricatures, paintings and prints alongside invoices and very varied written accounts to telling effect. Often most revealing are instances where different sources, or types of evidence – the archival and material for example – combine to illuminate. Somnier sets Arabella Denny’s design suggestions for Castle Caldwell side-by-side with extant designs for chimneypieces by the Darleys of Dublin. O’Toole quotes from Emily FitzGerald’s correspondence to examine changes in the preparation of the lying-in chamber – of which the duchess had more experience than most – while citing an 1804 invoice from the splendidly named Grubbs of Clonmel recording the purchase of a ‘mahogany nurse’s chair’, designed for the nursing mother, ‘part of an array of gender- and age-specific furniture items that emerged in luxury cabinetwork from the 1760s onwards’. She goes on to use the diary of Limerick farmer Nicholas Peacock to shed light on postpartum entertainment. Peacock sent his servant, Mick, to purchase expensive oranges and lemons for caudle, the refreshing drink served to new mothers which itself inspired a new form of drinking ware, the caudle cup. O’Toole, correctly, echoes Barnard who notes that a very small proportion of the ceramics in circulation in Ireland was of local manufacture and that ‘imports were ubiquitous’. She cites and illustrates caudle cups made by English manufacturers – Spode, Derby and Bow – but perhaps both authors overcompensate for the privileging of local manufactures in the connoisseurial literature hitherto and it is worth noting that a Belfast-made caudle cup survives from the very beginning of the eighteenth century. In acknowledging greater homogeneity of design as the century progressed, earlier indigenous manufacture – often distinctive – should not be overlooked.

Revisiting a subject explored in her recent, and much admired, study of wine consumption in Ireland, Patricia McCarthy offers similarly deft juggling of written sources and the surviving material culture of the dining room: wine-coolers, bottles, silver ware and the rather ingenious claret table. The book ends with a typically insightful essay in which Conor Lucey discusses the material and domiciliary needs of Dublin’s bachelors, by looking at the design of surviving two-room houses alongside contemporary correspondence and newspaper advertisements. He illustrates designs for another gendered piece of furniture, a shaving table by George Hepplewhite. Lucey reminds that ‘one size did not fit all’ and the complexity and diversity of the material in the volume he has edited is matched only by the scrupulous dexterity with which it is handled. At the outset Lucey quotes Gaston Bachelard that ‘a house that has been experienced is not an inert box’, and this volume, a major contribution to the subject, activates, imbues with life and charges with significance the numerous very different domestic spaces that it considers.