



Thomas Wright and Viscount Limerick at Tollymore Park, county Down

EILEEN HARRIS

THOMAS WRIGHT OF DURHAM (1711-1786) WAS AN AMATEUR IN THE BEST SENSE OF the word, a cherished retainer who flourished from about 1735 to 1765 in the branches of some of the most powerful and aristocratic families of the period, spending months at a time in one country house after another; enlightening his hosts and their children with his knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, drawing, surveying and so forth, and delighting them with his company (Plate 3). Wherever he went, he was consulted on matters of landscape gardening and building for which he provided advice and sketches free of charge. Unfortunately, however, his drawings were rarely preserved.

In 1746-47, Wright spent a year in Ireland, based at Dundalk, as the guest of James Hamilton, 2nd Viscount Limerick (1691-1758), created 1st Earl of Clanbrassil, to whom he had been introduced in the early 1740s in London (Plate 4). Wright stayed with Limerick for weeks on end in 1742-43, teaching him, his wife Lady Henrietta Bentinck, and their children, James (later 2nd Earl of Clanbrassil) and Anne. This brief article on Lord Limerick's Tollymore demesne in county Down is part of a much larger book about Thomas Wright on which I am currently engaged. It is limited to buildings that I am fairly certain were designed by Wright as I am now much more cautious in making attributions than I was in the heady 1970s when I first began writing articles about Wright for *Country Life* and finally published an edition of his *Arbours and Grottos* in 1979. Standing, dwarf-like upon the shoulders of two giants, Peter Rankin and Robert Jocelyn, the Earl of Roden, who have given us excellent works on Tollymore, I have tried to trace the development of the demesne as proposed by Wright, crediting Lord Limerick with the execution of his designs and offering an explanation for his eccentric roadside follies in the context of his

1 – View of south front of Tollymore House with Horn Bridge, c.1865

2 – Turrets at the ends of Clanbrassil (Ivy) Bridge (1780)

(photo by W.A. Green; courtesy Ulster Folk & Transport Museum)



3 – Thomas Wright of Durham (1711-1786), engraving by Paul Fourdrinier after a picture by George Allen of Bath (published as the frontispiece to Wright's *CLAVIS COELISTIS*, 1742)



4 – Francesco Trevisani, JAMES HAMILTON, 2nd Viscount Limerick, later 1st Earl of Clanbrassil c.1720, oil on canvas, 99 x 75 cm (private collection)

opposite 5 – Bernard Scalé, *A SURVEY OF TOLLYMORE PARK*, 1777, 28.5 x 39.3 cm (private collection)

theologically based natural philosophy.

It was for the express purpose of ‘representing with proper explanations, the principal ruins, curiosities, and antient dwellings in the County of Louth’ that Wright came to Ireland in June 1746.¹ In September of that year, having completed a three-hundred-mile ‘Itinerary to Loch Earn &c.’, he set out again with Lord Limerick for his deer park at Tollymore, 48 kilometres north of Dundalk, where he stayed for eight days.² While this was primarily intended as a sporting break for shooting and hunting, it was also a perfect opportunity for Limerick to consult Wright about his plans to build a summer house in the park and to provide it with appropriate pleasure grounds. At the time, the principal residence of the Hamilton family was the Manor House in the adjacent townland of Tollymore in Maghera Parish, a kilometre or so to the east, which they inherited in 1675 from the Magennis family.³ This latest phase of improvements followed close on the heels of the addition in 1740 of a large ‘New Deer Park’ of about 140 hectares to the west of the ‘Old Park’, and may have been stimulated by it.

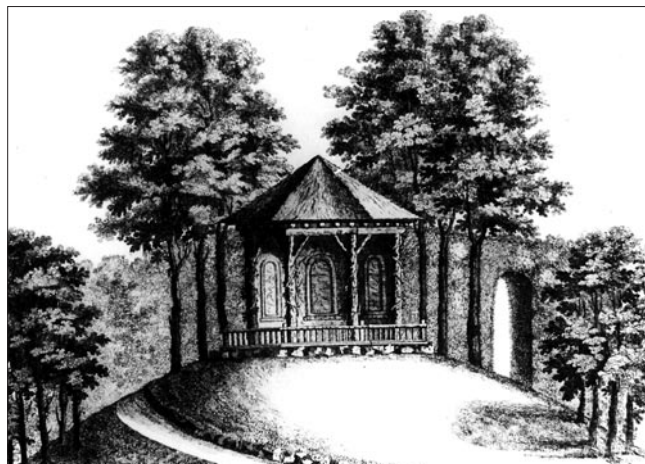
The ‘romantick’ situation of Tollymore Park, at the foothills of the mountains of Mourne, divided in two parts by the River Shimna running in a deep, rocky bed, is totally different from Limerick’s confined park in the town of Dundalk. It had not been properly surveyed at the time of Wright’s visit in 1746 and there was no question of him attempting to make one, which would have been too time-consuming and beyond his abilities. The earliest survey was made in 1760 by Bernard Scalé, who drew another in 1777 (Plate 5).⁴ The only surviving records of Tollymore Park before that date are two sketchy pen portraits, one written by Walter Harris in about 1743, the other by Richard Pococke in

1752.⁵ According to Harris, the park (meaning the ‘Old Park’) was ‘finely wooded, cut in to Ridings and Vistos, and Watered by a River running through it in a channel of Rocks and Precipices, which passes under a Bridge of hewn Stone’.⁶ The chequerboard of ‘Ridings and Vistos’ cut into the woods on the steep south bank of the river was approached from the Bryansford Road by a long, straight avenue across the stone bridge known as the ‘Old Bridge’. A date-stone of 1726 incorporated in the bridge supposedly marks the start of the development of the hunting park.⁷ Two new buildings were noted by Pococke in 1752:

just over the rivulet [on the south side of the ‘Old Park’] Lord Limerick has built a thatch’d open place to dine in, which is very Romantick, with a stove near to prepare the Entertainment: above on the North side of this He has begun to build a pretty lodge, two rooms of which are finished, designing to spend the Summer months here.⁸

It is a safe assumption that both were designed by Wright. The open, thatched pavilion fitted-up for summer dining was probably finished by 1750 and ready for use by the family and their friends who walked or rode there from the Manor House outside the park. By the end of the eighteenth century, this ephemeral structure had disappeared without a trace. However, its site has been convincingly identified by the Earl of Roden with the oval ring of columns in a clearing south of the river, which is shown on Scalé’s survey





6 – Thomas Wright, ‘Arbour of the Parasol Kind suited to a Situation commanding an extensive Prospect’

(engraving from *UNIVERSAL ARCHITECTURE, BOOK I: SIX ORIGINAL DESIGNS OF ARBOURS* (1755), pl. C)

opposite 7 – Thomas Milton, *TOLLYMORE PARK*, engraving after a painting by John James Barralet (detail)

(1787, from *A COLLECTION OF SELECT VIEWS FROM DIFFERENT SEATS OF THE NOBILITY AND GENTRY* (1783-93); courtesy the Follies Trust)

and labelled ‘Old Hermitage’.⁹ Its design has not survived, but must have been similar to the thatched arbour in the wilderness at Dundalk, which was evidently designed by someone else and erected before Wright’s arrival.

There are several designs for open thatched arbours among Wright’s ‘Various and Valuable Sketches and Designs of Buildings’ at the Avery Architectural Library, and a few others in his book of *Six original designs of arbours*, published in 1755 (Plate 6).¹⁰ The most pertinent of the latter is Design C (mistakenly described in the text as Design D), contrived ‘so as to appear all of one Mass growing together by the Consent of Nature’, with a thatched roof on columns of ‘rugged Trunks of Oak, the more fantastical and robust the better’, and an architrave of ‘the same unhewn Material’ supporting ‘a like rude Cornice, in some Degree reduced to Order and Design, with large and prominent Noby instead of Modillions’. The ‘Noby’ are the bap stones or large, round unhewn pebbles used by Wright on his eccentric roadside follies at Tollymore and imitated on several later buildings there. They are discussed below.

Lord Limerick’s ‘pretty lodge’, having been aggrandised by his son, the 2nd Earl of Clanbrassil, in the 1770s and by later generations, was finally demolished to make room for a car park in 1952, by which time it had more than tripled in size. Its south-facing site – on high ground beside the long avenue leading to the hunting ground, and with extensive views of the mountains of Mourne and Dundrum Bay in the distance – was most likely chosen by Limerick before he asked Wright to suggest a design that would take in the views. The garden front of Beaumont Lodge, Old Windsor, with its single-storey canted bow, was a most appropriate model being Wright’s very first house, designed in 1743 for Lady Limerick’s sister, Sophia, Dowager Duchess of Kent. Canted bows are also to be found on Wright’s menagerie at Horton, built for the Earl of Halifax in the late 1750s, and the south front of Hampton Court House, Middlesex, which he designed c.1756 for Halifax’s Irish mistress. Though bows were favoured by Wright, they were not exclusive to him.

Tollymore House (Plate 1) was probably finished, or nearly so, before 1758 when Lord Limerick died. Its south front, as shown in Thomas Milton's engraving of 1787 after a painting by John James Barralet (Plate 7),¹¹ consisted of a projecting two-storey block – one room deep and five-bays long – with a two-storey, three-bay central bow in the centre, flanked by single-storey, two-bay wings. The appearance of the north front is unknown; however, a sketch plan drawn by the Reverend Daniel Augustus Beaufort in 1787 suggests that there were low, single-bay projecting wings at each end.¹² These were subsequently subsumed into the courtyard extensions.

As at Dundalk House, the development of the accompanying pleasure grounds had a far-reaching effect on the rest of the demesne. It was conveniently situated below and to the west of the house on the northern perimeter of the park, backing on to the Bryansford-Hilltown Road, parallel to the river. Scalé's maps, which are all we have to go on, show a serpentine path meandering through wooded plantations, past open meadows, lawn and paddock, across the diverted stream, through an opening in the wall between the 'new deer Park' and the 'old', and finally exiting by a 'porter's lodge' onto the Hilltown Road towards Newry and Dundalk (Plate 5). This extended layout, linking the east and west sides of the demesne with the house in the centre, was Wright's idea, conceived when he was on the spot in 1746 and most likely implemented in the early 1750s when the house was being built. The building of the Barbican Gate at the customary eastern entrance to the park, and Horn Bridge over the diverted stream, were logical consequences of the new layout and contemporary with it; in other words, they were built in Lord Limerick's lifetime (see Plates 6 and 8).

In the absence of contemporary accounts, correspondence or other documents relating to the garden buildings at Tollymore, accurate dating is virtually impossible. It has been assumed that buildings not shown on James Kennedy's 1755 and 1767 maps of county Down or the estate surveys made by Bernard Scalé in 1760 and 1777 were, *ipso facto*, put up at a later date, after 1777.¹³ No account is taken of the tendency of Irish land





surveyors of the period, primarily concerned with topography, to omit minor buildings unless requested to do otherwise, as Scalé presumably was at Dundalk.¹⁴ The *post quem* dating of the Tollymore garden buildings, based solely upon whether or not they appear on Scalé's 1777 survey, has led to the implausible conclusion that Wright's designs were not executed by Lord Limerick for whom they were made, but rather by his son, James Hamilton, 2nd Earl of Clanbrassil (henceforth, referred to as Clanbrassil to distinguish him from his father who was created 1st Earl in 1756).

Not only does this chronology overestimate the role of Clanbrassil and underestimate that of Lord Limerick, despite the fact that he was Wright's principal Irish protégé, patron and friend, it also completely ignores Lady Limerick and overlooks the visual evidence provided by the buildings themselves. It was owing to Lady Limerick and her family connections that Wright was brought into the picture in the first place. Like her sister, Sophia, Duchess of Kent, she was one of his pupils, and there can be little doubt that she took an active interest in the implementation of his designs for Tollymore as well as Dundalk. Wright had twenty letters from her and Lord Limerick in his 'Cabinet of Letters' at Byers Green, more than he had from the Duke and Duchess of Kent.¹⁵ Even more implausible is the supposed gap of thirty or more years between 1746/47 when Wright made his designs, and their post-1777 execution. A continuum seems much more likely; indeed, the ten-year interval between Wright's departure from Ireland in 1747 and Lord Limerick's death in 1758 was ample time to execute his simple buildings. Even so, the

sequence of building activity remains conjectural.

The Barbican Gate (Plate 8), being the principal entrance to Tollymore, built into the boundary wall, is a suitable starting point. Its embattled castle style – complete with two round towers, quatrefoils, loopholes, blind trefoils and a crenellated parapet – is a tribute to the castle at the mouth of the River Shimna at Newcastle which was built in the late sixteenth century by Felix Magennis, from whom Lord Limerick’s Hamilton grandfather inherited the Tollymore estate.¹⁶ It is, in any case, a more appropriate introduction to the wild and ‘romantick’ scenery than the manicured Georgian house, and was adapted in one form or another for most of the garden buildings. St Laurence’s Gate, built in the thirteenth century at Drogheda, near the site of the Battle of the Boyne, which Wright had recently studied and drawn for *Louthiana*, was a handy model (Plate 9).¹⁷

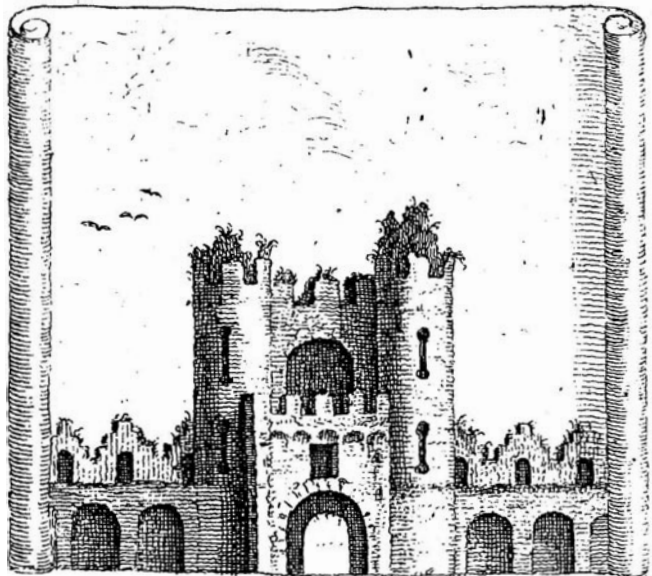
Horn Bridge (Plate 10) can be considered the entrance to the pleasure grounds, and is stylistically related to and, no doubt, contemporary with the Barbican Gate. Although it is a comparatively small structure of rendered rubble built across a minor tributary of the Shimna, its battlemented parapet and large, pointed arch, flanked by outsize, blind quatrefoils, give it an imposing appearance. It is the only building within the pleasure grounds that is unquestionably by Wright, and is shown, but not labelled, on Scalé’s 1777 survey. Though exact designs have not been located, there are comparable drawings for a ‘Gothic Water-gate over a Canal’ in his album of ‘Sketches and Designs’ at the Avery Library.¹⁸

Outside the confines of the park, on the Bryansford-Hilltown road, west of the Bryansford Gate, bordering Wright’s pleasure grounds, is a widely spaced group of three different castellated Gothick structures known as Lord Limerick’s follies. They are of fairly modest size, built of rubble, crowned by spires, and ornamented with prominent

9 – Thomas Wright,
*ST LAURENCE’S GATE AT
 DROGHEDA, engraving by Paul
 Fourdrinier (from LOUTHIANA:
 BOOK II (1758), contents vignette)*

opposite

8 – Thomas Wright,
*Barbican Gate: west (inner)
 front (c.1755)*
*(photo by Edward Wilson; courtesy
 the Follies Trust)*





10 – Thomas Wright, Horn Bridge (c.1755) (photo by James McEvoy; courtesy the Follies Trust)

opposite – Thomas Wright, Lord Limerick’s follies (c.1755)

11 – Hexagonal roadside tower / 12 – Square roadside tower / 13 – Roadside gate piers

(photos by Edward Wilson; courtesy the Follies Trust)

round stones. Described by Wright as ‘Nobs’, and now called ‘bap’ stones, they were found locally on the coast or in the River Shimna, and used to represent crockets, modillions and battlements. The bap stones on the roadside follies were imitated in the park in the 1780s on Foley’s Bridge, Clanbrassil Barn and Bryansford Gate, where, unlike Wright’s originals, they are strictly ornamental and unrelated to architectural elements. These later imitations made them into a kind of Tollymore hallmark. According to the Reverend Daniel Augustus Beaufort, who visited Tollymore in 1787, the buildings at Lord Moira’s demesne (Moira Castle, demolished in 1870) were also ornamented with these distinctive stones.¹⁹

The first folly beyond Bryansford Gate is on the south side of the road astride the low park wall, to which it is joined on each side by a small flying buttress (Plate 12). Its square base has a tall, pointed arch towards the road, which is now blocked but was originally open to a vaulted tunnel leading through to the pleasure grounds. Its function as a secondary entrance may explain the formality of its design compared to the other two follies. Above the cornice, which is supported by bap-stone modillions, is a pyramidal



spire with bap stones on each face. In elevation, the combination of curved buttresses, pointed arch and pyramid resembles the upper part of Sir Edward Lovett Pearce's gateway at Arch Hall, Wilkinstown, county Meath.²⁰ Wright evidently admired Pearce's designs, which he saw at Stillorgan.²¹ About 275 meters to the west, on the opposite (north) side of the road, is a pair of circular gate piers with blind loopholes in front and conical spires surrounded by large, upright bap stones representing battlements (Plate 13). The gates lead into an open field.

Finally, further west, on the same side of the road, is the largest and most prominent of the group, built on a raised bank at the intersection of two low walls (Plate 11). Its circular base supports a solid, hexagonal tower with alternating blind quatrefoils, loopholes and pointed arches. The east-facing arch, reached by a few crude steps, serves as a seat or viewing platform looking out towards the sea. There are split bap stones placed on end above the cornice, resembling battlements and a tall, conical spire, like a church tower ringed with baps as crockets. My initial association of the conical spires with two sketches by Wright based on the sepulchre of the Horatii and the Curatii at Albano outside Rome was a red herring; the sketches in question – reproduced by Rankin and Roden – were almost certainly made for a monument at Stoke Gifford.²² It makes more sense to relate the spires of Lord Limerick's follies to the surrounding mountains of Mourne, especially since the name Tollymore means large hill or mound, referring to Slieve Snivant and Slieve Neir.²³

The similarity between spires and peaks does not in itself account for the unconventional location of the follies on the public road, outside rather than within the park walls. In all probability they were intended to act as roadside advertisements or signposts informing passers-by of the existence of the several new improvements – viz. the mansion house, Barbican Gate, Horn Bridge, open thatched cottage and pleasure grounds – that had been or were being made by Lord Limerick and Wright in the Shimna valley, but could not be seen from the Bryansford road.

When they were constructed is another question. The late date, about 1780, that has been assigned because of their omission from Scalé's 1777 survey, would make them exactly contemporary with the turrets at the ends of Clanbrassil (Ivy) Bridge (Plate 2).²⁴ Yet, they are visibly too different in spirit, style and detail to be of the same date. There can be little doubt that Wright's eccentric roadside follies were built in Limerick's lifetime. Lord Limerick's follies also have a special Wrightian significance, which, though too recondite for the average traveller, would have been understood by Lord and Lady Limerick, their family, and possibly by other Irish initiates. Constructed as they are of unhewn materials, they are the earliest manifestations of Wright's notion of 'Universal Architecture' as buildings 'formed by the Hand of Nature' – that is, by the Creator. Perhaps the follies placed on the fringe of Wright's pleasure grounds were Lord and Lady Limerick's tribute to their friend and mentor.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Thomas Wright, *Louthiana, or an introduction to the antiquities of Ireland* (London, 1748).
- ² Wright's account of his Irish tour appears at the end of his 'Early Journal', British Museum, Add MSS 15627. This is printed in J. Buckley (ed.), 'The Journal of Thomas Wright, Author of *Louthiana* (1711-1786)', *County Louth Archaeological Journal*, II, no. 2, 1909, 182.
- ³ Robert Jocelyn, Earl of Roden, *Tollymore: the story of an Irish demesne* (Belfast, 2005) 19-20.
- ⁴ Both surveys are in the possession of the present Earl of Roden. The one of 1760 is quite faded. Roden, *Tollymore*, 27, 50, 51.
- ⁵ Walter Harris and Charles Smith, *The Antient and present state of the county of Down* (Dublin, 1744) 82, with a map dated 1743. G.T. Stokes (ed.), *Pococke's tour in Ireland in 1752* (Dublin, 1891) 8.
- ⁶ Stokes, *Pococke's tour in Ireland*, 82.
- ⁷ Roden, *Tollymore*, 36
- ⁸ Stokes, *Pococke's tour in Ireland*, 8.
- ⁹ Roden, *Tollymore*, 38, 182. For the enlargement of Scalé's survey, 50.
- ¹⁰ Avery Architectural Library, Columbia University, New York, Thomas Wright, 'Various and Valuable Sketches and Designs of Buildings', 92, 105, 106, 109.
- ¹¹ Thomas Milton, *Collection of select views from different seats of the nobility and gentry in the kingdom of Ireland* (London, 1783-93); Roden, *Tollymore*, 41.
- ¹² Roden, *Tollymore*, 54.
- ¹³ Peter Rankin, *Historic buildings, groups of buildings, areas of architectural importance in the Mourne area of south Down* (Belfast, 1975); Peter Rankin, *Tollymore Park, the Gothick Revival of Thomas Wright & Lord Limerick* (Belfast, 2010), 24, *passim*; Roden, *Tollymore*, *passim*. I expressed tentative reservations about this dating in the entry on Tollymore in my 'Catalogue of Wright's Works in Architecture and Garden Design' appended to the facsimile of his *Arbours and Grottos* (London, 1979). Similar reservations have been expressed in James Howley, *The Follies and Garden Buildings of Ireland* (London, 1993), 200.
- ¹⁴ J.H. Andrews, *Plantation acres, an historical study of the Irish land surveyor and his maps* (Belfast, 1985), 279. It is worth noting that buildings are not included in the list of 'accurate drawings' Scalé advertised in 1758; *ibid.*, 227.
- ¹⁵ Newcastle City Library, Thomas Wright MSS, vol VII, fol. 11.
- ¹⁶ Roden, *Tollymore*, 16. The castle was demolished in the nineteenth century. The remains of another castle survive at Dundrum, near Newcastle.
- ¹⁷ See the vignette at the end of the contents page of part II of Wright, *Louthiana*. There are two comparable designs by Wright for castle-style gates: one in the album of sketches at the Avery Library (fol. 42A), but whether it was made for Tollymore is not known; the other of 1769, for a gatehouse with round crenellated towers and three arches, was made for Sir Walter Blackett at Rothley Park near Wallington, Northumberland. See Roden, *Tollymore*, 57, 58, 60.
- ¹⁸ Wright, 'Various and Valuable Sketches and Designs of Buildings', 59, 61.
- ¹⁹ Trinity College Dublin, MS 4025-8, Rev Daniel Augustus Beaufort, 'Journal of a tour through part of Ireland 1787'; Rankin, *Historic buildings*, 18.
- ²⁰ Howley, *Follies and Garden Buildings*, 71
- ²¹ E. Harris, 'Jacobites and Horses at Nuthall Temple', *The Georgian Group Journal*, XX, 2012, 80.
- ²² Harris, 'Catalogue of Wright's works'; Wright, 'Various and valuable sketches', 50A, 50B; Rankin, *Tollymore Park*, 43, pl. 43; Roden, *Tollymore*, 59; J.R. Russell, *Three garden buildings by Thomas Wright in Stoke Park, Bristol* (Bristol, 1988) 5-6.
- ²³ Roden, *Tollymore*, 3.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, illustrations at 77, 78.