

ha-ha walls and vistas. Moreover, he planned near the end of his life to make more of a landscape garden than he had before by extending lawns, creating a gravel walk along the Potomac, and ceasing major agricultural work at his home farm.

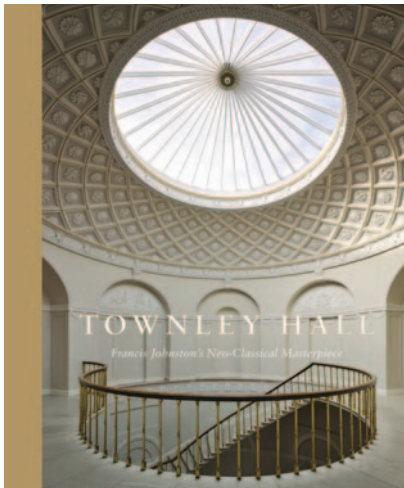
A brief review cannot describe the many facets of O’Kane’s book, as she touches on many heterogeneous issues. In social matters, the book covers slavery and anti-slavery, paid workers, and emigration to the New World. Considering estate management, she writes about absenteeism, the improvement of soil, water management, and surveying methods. In the realm of material culture, O’Kane describes travellers’ approaches to estates, the development of suburbia in Ireland, the establishment of prospects, views, and vistas, military touring and map-making, and a host of other visual or aesthetic subjects. The broad span of time and geography covered, and the diversity of the topics, leave room for future scholars in many areas. As it is, *Landscape Design & Revolution* is a fine addition to transatlantic and landscape studies, and is especially satisfying and trustworthy through O’Kane’s extensive use of early written and visual evidence.

Robert O’Byrne et al

TOWNLEY HALL – FRANCIS JOHNSTON’S NEO-CLASSICAL MASTERPIECE

(Gandon Editions, Kinsale, 2022) isbn 978-1-910140-31-4, 280 pages, 30x25cm, 760 illus, index, €40 hb

review by Kevin V. Mulligan



FRANCIS JOHNSTON’S TOWNLEY HALL, BEGUN in 1794 for Blayney Townley Balfour (1769-1856) on an elevated site above the River Boyne, north of Drogheda, is deservedly and widely accepted as a masterpiece of neoclassical design and a worthy subject for celebration, which the building and its architect receives in this copiously illustrated monograph, produced by the owners of the building, the School of Philosophy & Economic Science, to commemorate their fifty-year existence in Ireland.

Exceptionally for a country house of its size, the historic and architectural development of Townley Hall has been well documented, with its significance previously recognised as early as

1948, when, in a time of profound apathy, singular focus was given to the house in a series of thoughtful and insightful articles by Christopher Hussey in *Country Life*, accompanied by evocative photographs, some reproduced to good effect in this volume. Later, issues of the *Irish Georgian Society Bulletin* were devoted separately to the architect and the building – in 1969 with Edward McParland’s seminal study of Johnston which opens with Townley Hall, and in 1987 when the polymath, and departing owner of the

house, Frank Mitchell, provided a personal and uniquely insightful exploration of the building's evolution, while also revealing Balfour's discernment as a patron and the vital contributions made by his sister Anna Maria and his wife Lady Florence Cole. Each of these publications has informed the various essays in the present volume, though it is fair to say none of those earlier studies have been superseded by any of the contributions here.

The Dublin-based School of Philosophy has been associated with Townley Hall since the 1970s, when it first began to use the building as a study centre and residential retreat, eventually acquiring it and the remaining sixty acres of land on favourable terms from Prof Mitchell in 1987. It is evident that the School has been a proud and passionate owner of the property – that is, if one leaves aside the rather strange aberration of the shed-like excrescence made to Johnston's extraordinary kitchen wing in recent, and otherwise welcome, works to redeem the wing from ruin. Naturally, the School has found within the geometry and refinements of the architecture a perfect expression of the Platonic, and universal, ideals of 'beauty and truth, harmony and proportion', which is expressed first in the foreword, and surfaces as a theme throughout the book, emphasised especially, for example, in the introduction by evoking Euclid, Vitruvius and Palladio, and even if perhaps at times this becomes a little overstated, one could not argue with the conclusion that at 'Townley Hall we are invited into an environment with a real sense of everything being in harmony'.

Unfortunately, that sentiment is not entirely applicable to the book, and while the production reflects Gandon's usual high-quality design, the chosen structure seems decidedly discordant, suggesting it was formed by committee without the benefits of a discerning editorial eye (no editor is credited). Arranged into eleven chapters by various contributors, the first six essays are broken by a colour photographic section which represent a strong and vital visual record, even if the unfurnished rooms appear strangely soulless and the exterior looks rather intruded upon by its diminished setting, having now lost that wonderful relationship to the old parkland so atmospherically captured in F.W. Westley's 1948 photographs.

Mistakenly, and very regrettably, the house contents and the historic demesne, its grounds and gardens, are largely ignored in the book, and these really should have been subject to individual essays. The first three chapters by Robert O'Byrne do provide a useful introduction to family history and evolution of the building, and all are handsomely illustrated with family portraits, topographical views, photographs, plans, documents and maps, though in the latter items the reproduction is hopelessly small, evidently intended only for the eyes of pixies, a problem that recurs with images elsewhere. The first chapter sets the scene and outlines the historic development of the site, traces the origins of the Townley family, its acquisition of lands in Louth and the inheritance of the Balfour estate and name. The researches of Frank Mitchell and more recent research by Ruth Thorpe largely inform the evolution of the design in the second chapter, with no new or critical insights offered. The third chapter, nebulously titled 'Challenging Times', takes us beyond 1800 and up to the sale of the property in 1956. The narrative completely flounders here in what seems like too heavy a reliance on pot-luck pickings from the copious Townley Balfour papers, without any sense that a judicious selection or serious scrutiny of the primary sources was made. Consequently, we are left adrift to speculate on the catastrophic

*Drawing by Francis Johnston
of east elevation of Townley
Hall, showing the house as
executed*

*(Irish Architectural Archive /
Townley Hall Collection)*



collapse of Blayney Townley Balfour's finances at his death in 1856, offered little more than trite references – visually, in starving 'Bridge O'Donnell and her children' and in the idle statement that 'the family finances would be further adversely affected in the 1840s by the onset of the Great Famine'. Notice of rotting potatoes in neighbouring fields and the compassionate philanthropy shown by Balfour's agent in distributing oatmeal to necessitous tenantry will not pass scrutiny by the Irish country house studies fraternity. By irrelevant detours into slavery and musings on the collection of Jacobite memorabilia we are brought back to a more coherent narrative of family succession and their eventual departure with the sale of the house and demesne to Trinity College Dublin as a short-lived agricultural institute – the Kells Ingram Farm.

There follows a personal tribute by Michael Telford to Frank Mitchell and his creation of a study centre there, providing fond memories of the School's early association with the house and their ongoing facilitation of public events. This somewhat rambling account is all very relevant, but would have been better placed later in the book and the biography of Johnston rescued from the nether regions and introduced here instead. Consequently Telford's chapter forms a strange counterweight to Seán O'Reilly's more cerebral, if at times impenetrable essay which contemplates the Platonic ideals inherent in the architectural purity of Johnston's design and explains the significance of Hussey's 1948 *Country Life* articles which, with the assistance of Westley's powerful photographs, uncovered 'the perfectionism of geometric architectural form implicit in its design'. O'Reilly forcefully claims the house 'not only deserved its own perfected interpretation, but demanded it', concluding that it 'found that presentation when it was offered for the widest public consumption' across the pages of *Country Life*. The direction of the book changes again where Brendan Kiernan explores the anatomy of the structure in an excellent account of the building fabric that reveals Johnston's consummate design skill when subjugating practical necessity to considerations of beauty.

The final sections constitute an important resource for the architect, beginning with Michael Kavanagh's biography of Johnston, essentially a summary of the architect's already well-documented career followed by a selection of his works, all superbly illus-

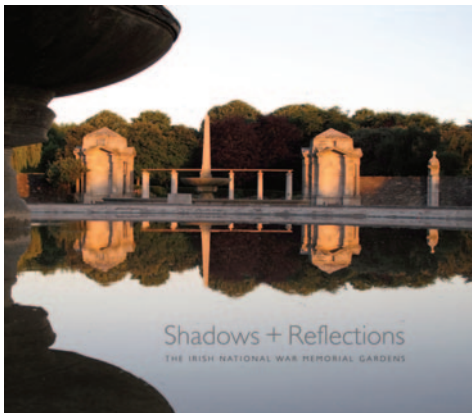
trated, including some of Kavanagh's own elevations and plans. A more detailed 'catalogue of works' is similarly illustrated, and provides a useful survey and is really a highlight of the book, though it was a mistake to combine the architect's documented buildings with those only attributed to him on often rather shaky stylistic grounds; instead these buildings should have been considered separately, and more critically. Better attention and more careful research certainly would have avoided mistakes such as confusing Drumsill House in Armagh with The Argory, or describing Kilmore House as Johnston's 'ancestral home'; the building in fact is a glebe house acquired by the architect's clergyman nephew. Colum O'Riordan introduces the Townley Hall collection in the Irish Architectural Archive, drawings that are here beautifully reproduced, with Johnston's precise and carefully rendered elevations a tribute to his master Cooley, and still captivating – gloriously triumphing over the modern CAD surveys of the buildings that conclude this fitting celebration of the architect and his avowed masterpiece.

Annie Dibble and Angela Rolfe (eds)

**SHADOWS + REFLECTIONS:
THE IRISH NATIONAL WAR MEMORIAL GARDENS AT ISLANDBRIDGE**

(Gandon Editions, Kinsale, 2021) isbn 978-1-910140-32-1, 144 pages, 23x25cm, 94 illus, €25 hb

review by Paula Murphy



SHADOWS + REFLECTIONS, WRITTEN BY women about a location that commemorates men, has as its focus the Irish National War Memorial Gardens. In a fusion of the academic, the poetic and the personal, the gardens are revealed in a variety of different ways. The book, as one might expect, is richly illustrated. An abundance of photographs often suggests a 'coffee-table' publication. But the photographs, which are striking, take the form of a picture essay throughout and are clearly the work of one person. Forgive me for not

giving the name of the photographer immediately, I had to search for it in the text. It is not listed on the title page. Annie Dibble, who is the photographer, is only indicated there as co-editor. There is something odd about having difficulty locating the name of the photographer when the photographs are such an important element of the publication. Dibble's shots of the gardens, both overviews and details, were taken across the seasons in all weather conditions. Some are boldly colourful and others are moody and dark. They reveal a real familiarity with a place that she describes as 'our local park'. But she retains the right to exclude people from the photographs, which works well.

From serving as a local park to functioning as a site for annual remembrances, all