

*1— Soane's ELEVATION AND PLAN OF A DOG-HOUSE DESIGNED FOR A NOBLEMAN ROMAE 1779
The original drawing hangs in Sir John Soane's Museum, London.*

An unpublished watercolour by James Malton from the collection of Desmond Guinness

DESMOND GUINNESS

THE YOUNG JOHN SOANE AND HIS POTENTIAL PATRON FREDERICK HERVEY, Bishop of Derry, later 4th Earl of Bristol, together concocted an idea for a kennel or ‘dog-house’ (Plates 1, 5-7). It owes its inspiration to a visit by Hervey and Soane to the Villa of Lucullus, near Terracina, as they travelled south to Naples together in December 1778. Soane remembered the bishop saying, ‘I should like to form some idea of a classical dog kennel, as I intend to build one at the Downhill for the hounds of my eldest son.’¹

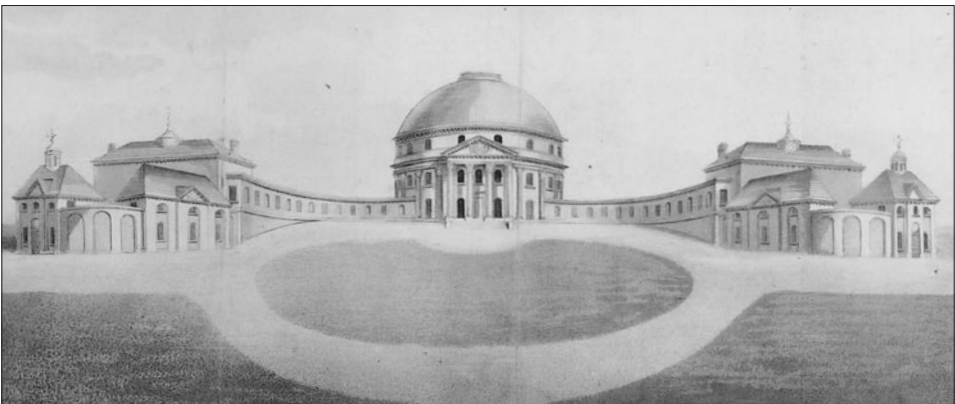
Soane produced a drawing (Sir John Soane’s Museum, London) which ‘provided for a circular fenced-in yard with three separate drinking basins linked to the separate functions of the three arms of the little building. One arm contained the kennel attendant’s residence, the second a heated veterinary sick-bay, and the third kept the bitches from mingling with the male dogs, housed in the central rotunda.’² The kennel featured the baseless Greek Doric columns seen by Soane at Paestum, and the attic of the drum was borrowed from the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, with Soane replacing the traditional bucrania with dogs’ heads.³ In the Age of Reason it made sense to ornament a kennel with hounds and huntsmen. As du Prey points out, ‘The purpose of Soane’s doghouse proclaims itself as loudly as if it barked.’⁴

Earlier in 1778, Soane had been awarded a three-year scholarship by the Royal Academy of Arts which enabled him to measure the buildings of ancient Rome. Also, as the son of a bricklayer, it was essential for him to look out for prospective patrons in England or Ireland so that his designs could materialise into buildings. The ‘Edifying Bishop’ seemed the ideal patron to cultivate. He was enormously rich, very extravagant, and was in the process of building two vast country houses in Ireland – Downhill (Plate 2) and Ballyscullion (Plate 3), both in county



2 – View of Downhill, county Londonderry, in its ruined state
(courtesy National Trust Photographic Library; photo Mike Williams)

3 – Engraving by J. Ford of Ballyscullion, county Londonderry
(reproduced from E.V. Sampson, *STATISTICAL SURVEY OF COUNTY LONDONDERRY* (Dublin 1802))





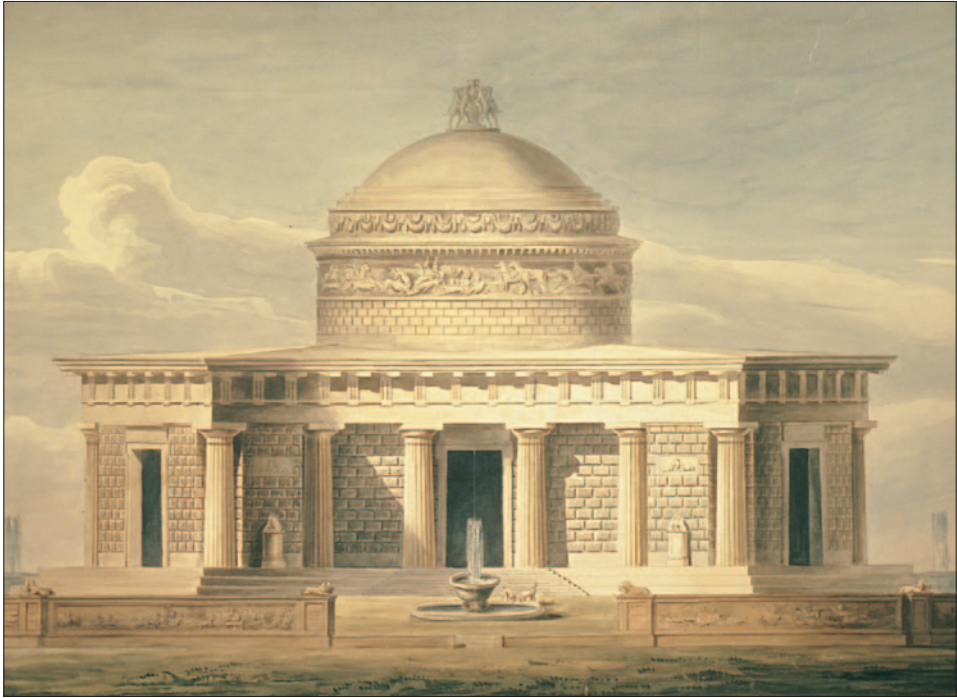
4 – Ickworth, Suffolk

(courtesy National Trust Photographic Library; photo Rupert Truman)

Londonderry; he later embarked on Ickworth in Suffolk (Plate 4).

Frederick Hervey was born in 1730 and named after Frederick, Prince of Wales, one of the sponsors at his christening. The year 2003 marks the bicentenary of his death, which occurred on 18 July 1803, when he was on the way from Albano to Rome, accompanied by a splendid cortege. The Earl-Bishop was taken ill, and the owner of the first cottage they found was approached for water for the dying man. Amazed by the splendour of the equipages, the farmer who provided the water made enquiries, and when he discovered the cortege belonged to a heretic prelate, he feared that if the Earl-Bishop expired under his roof, it might bring a curse on his family. Accordingly, the grand old man was bundled into a stable where he breathed his last.

The Earl-Bishop had a marked preference for domes, and had actually made an offer to purchase the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli so as to have it shipped, stone by



5 – Soane's elevation for a dog kennel, drawn by his pupil C.J. Richardson (1809-1872) c.1835

6 – Detail of the dome





7 – Detail of Soane's elevation for a dog kennel
(all illustrations courtesy Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum)



*8 – Mussenden Temple, Downhill, county Londonderry
(courtesy National Trust Photographic Library; photo Mike Williams)*

stone, to Downhill. Instead, the circular Mussenden Temple, designed by the Cork architect Michael Shanahan, was built in 1783, perching on the cliff-top looking out to sea. The dome was to have been gilded. The frieze is ornamented by a Latin inscription carved into the stone, which translates:

IT IS NOT UNPLEASANT WHEN SAFE ON DRY LAND TO WATCH
THOSE FLOUNDERING ABOUT IN THE DEEP

...not a particularly Christian sentiment. It was fitted up as a library. However, it was



9 – Mausoleum at Downhill, modelled on the Roman monument of the Julii at Saint-Rémy, Provence (courtesy National Trust Photographic Library; photo Steven Wooster)

built too near the edge of the cliff which has eroded, but fortunately the American-based World Monuments Fund became aware of the problem and recently shored it up at a cost of £300,000.

The Earl-Bishop adored his young and beautiful kinswoman Mrs Frideswide Mussenden, who, in 1783, tragically died at the age of 22. He always put her beside him at table, but their relationship was platonic, although, of course, tongues wagged. The Mussenden Temple (Plate 8), which commemorates her, is Ulster's answer to the Casino at Marino near Dublin, designed by Sir William Chambers for the Earl-



10 – Mme Elizabeth Vigée le Brun, portrait of the Earl-Bishop with Vesuvius in the background

(Ickworth, The Bristol Collection; (The National Trust), courtesy National Trust Photographic Library; photo Angelo Hornak)

opposite

11 – James Malton, PROPOSAL FOR A TRIANGULAR BUILDING, 1792

(collection The Hon Desmond Guinness; photo Charles Campbell)

Bishop's great enemy, Lord Charlemont, in 1758. Roman Catholics in the vicinity of Downhill were invited to celebrate Mass in the basement of the temple, a gesture of which Charlemont might not have approved. Both buildings were designed with hollow columns for the rainwater, avoiding unsightly gutters and downpipes.

Also at Downhill, Shanahan was responsible for the design of the mausoleum, erected to the memory of the bishop's brother, the Lord Lieutenant (Plate 9). It was begun in 1779, and was modelled on the Roman monument of the Julii at Saint-Rémy in Provence. The pedestal and lower Ionic stage originally supported eight Corinthian columns surmounted by a cupola, under which was placed a marble statue of the Lord Lieutenant, which had been carved in Dublin by Van Nost. Both cupola and statue were blown down in the Great Wind of January 1839, and the damage was never repaired.

Ballyscullion, the Earl-Bishop's other house in county Londonderry, had a vast dome over the central block, curved sweeps and wings. It was designed by the Cork architect Michael Shanahan, and the foundation stone was laid in 1787. Much of it was complete and habitable, but nothing now remains of this remarkable building except the portico which fronts St George's church in Belfast.



Ickworth was built on land which the Herveys had owned in Suffolk since the fifteenth century. It is a version of Ballyscullion, again with a large central dome, built by the Irish architect Francis Sandys in 1796, on the basis of a design by the Italian architect Mario Asprucci. It was completed long after the death of the Earl-Bishop but the interior became heavier with the passage of time and the family's advancement to a marquessate. The Earl-Bishop's three great houses were supposed to display to the general public the works of art amassed by him on his travels – some of it commissioned, some bought from dealers – so as to educate and enthrall his visitors. This was, sadly, never to take place.

Having made friends with the bishop, Soane cut short his Italian stay. Work was in progress at Downhill, and if he declined the invitation to help complete the job, many a hungry architect would have taken his place. However, the bishop neglected to send for Soane when he reached Ulster, and he had to carry his luggage from county Antrim to county Londonderry. Downhill was upside down, leaking, unfinished – in chaos. Plans by Soane were agreed and soon abandoned; his notebook survives at Sir John Soane's Museum in London.⁵ One commission was for a dining room. Soane came up with an oblong room that had an oval of columns and a

floor plan, echoed in the ceiling, that was based on Michelangelo's pavement at the Capitoline Hill in Rome – very handsome designs that came to nothing and for which he received no payment. His dreadful experience in Ireland as a young man apparently haunted Soane for the rest of his days.

Evidently the Earl-Bishop kept the idea of a domed triangular dog kennel in mind. Thirty years ago, I purchased a watercolour from the Dublin antique dealer Gerry Kenyon, who had bought it from Monty Sainsbury of Bath (Plate 11). It is signed 'Jas Malton Arch..s et Del..t 1792' (Plate 12).⁶ Malton's watercolour shows a domed building with three smaller domed offshoots, the triangular ground plan being held up by the artist himself. A second figure wearing a black hat, white cravat, black coat, black breeches, stockings and shoes (with silver buckles) is without doubt the Earl-Bishop, easily recognisable from his many portraits, such as that by Elizabeth Vigée le Brun (Plate 10).

The plan in the watercolour (Plate 13) shows each of the three offshoots from the central dome, measuring a slightly different length. It must have been a preliminary drawing for the bishop – shown pointing at the plan with his stick – to choose the length he preferred, or else a very lopsided building would have resulted.

The triangle is seldom found in architectural conceits. The earliest and best known of all is Longford Castle in Wiltshire, built by Sir Thomas Gorges in 1591. Sir Thomas Tresham, who spent years in the Tower of London for clinging to the Old Faith, built Triangular Lodge at Rushton, Northhamptonshire, in 1597, symbolising the Holy Trinity. Midford Castle near Bath (1775) was designed by John Carter for H. Disney Roebuck in the form of an ace of clubs, the winning card that paid for it. Severndroog Castle (1784) on Shooters Hill in Kent, is a triangular red-brick tower with turrets, built to commemorate Sir William James's victory over a pirate captain near Goa off the Indian coast. A folly castle called Gibraltar, on an island in the lake at Larchill, county Meath, is the only eighteenth-century example in Ireland of which the writer is aware.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

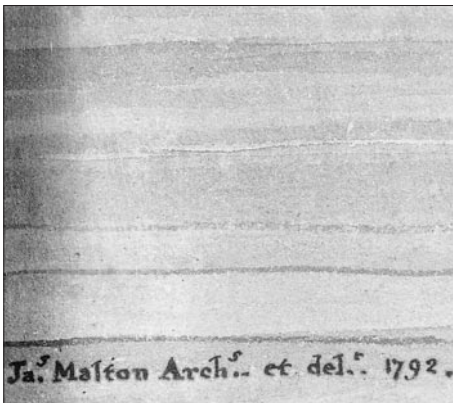
Thanks are due to Naomi Gordon, World Monuments Fund; National Trust (Committee for Northern Ireland); Sir Charles Brett; Susan Palmer, Sir John Soane's Museum, London; Sarah Blackburn, National Trust Photo Library, London; Arthur Prager, Irish Georgian Society, New York, John Jolliffe; Charles Campbell, photographer, Leixlip; and Christopher Moore.

ENDNOTES

By far the most useful source for this article was Peter Rankin's, *Irish Building Ventures of the Earl-Bishop of Derry* (Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, Belfast 1972).

- ¹ John Soane, *Memoirs of the Professional Life of an Architect* (privately printed 1835), 15.
- ² Pierre du Prey, 'Je n'oublieray jamais, John Soane and Downhill', *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, xxi, July-December 1978, 19.
- ³ Margaret Richardson and Mary-Anne Stevens (eds), *John Soane Architect: Master of Space and Light*, exhibition catalogue, Royal Academy of Arts (London 1999), cat. 26.
- ⁴ du Prey, 'Je n'oublieray jamais', 20.
- ⁵ Pierre du Prey has analysed Soane's 'Downhill Notebook' brilliantly in John Soane, *The Making of an Architect* (Chicago and London 1982).
- ⁶ It was James Malton who produced the wonderful series of *25 Views of Dublin* (1791-1799), unsurpassed for their beauty and the accuracy of their architectural detail.

12 – James Malton, *PROPOSAL FOR A TRIANGULAR BUILDING, 1792*
detail of inscription
(photo Charles Campbell)



13 – James Malton, *PROPOSAL FOR A TRIANGULAR BUILDING, 1792*
detail of figures shown with architectural plan
(photo Charles Campbell)

