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**THE REDECORATION AND ALTERATION OF
CASTLETOWN HOUSE
BY LADY LOUISA CONOLLY
1759-76**

by

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Introduction

Castletown House, Celbridge, County Kildare is the largest and finest palladian¹ country house in Ireland. Its building in 1722 marked the beginning of the palladian invasion of Ireland and the house is contemporary with the earliest examples of palladianism in England. The elegance and formality of Castletown may certainly compare with that to be found in the English great house of the period, but it was scarcely typical of Ireland, for it was the rule to spend lavishly on everything that brought immediate pleasure at the cost of neglecting house and grounds and to sacrifice the niceties of living.

Castletown was built for William Conolly (1662-1729), speaker of the Irish house of commons. He was a self made man and was reputedly the wealthiest man in Ireland. Conolly was a legend in his own lifetime and one petitioner wrote 'whatsoever you undertake, God prospers'.² As speaker it became necessary to have a residence close to the capital and he acquired the land near the river Liffey at

¹ Style derived from the buildings and publications of Andrea Palladio (1508-80), one of the most influential and one of the greatest Italian architects; the only architect whose name has been immortalised in a style of building known throughout the world.

Celbridge in 1709. Before this he had a house, though somewhat smaller than Castletown, at Rodanstown near Kilcock, County Kildare³ but it was not suitable for a man of his position - the size of a house was often an indication of a family's importance. An outstanding characteristic of Irish Georgian houses is a largeness of scale, due primarily to the cheapness of labour but more directly to the zest of a high spirited and competitive oligarchy inspired by the entire absence of suitable housing to vie in magnificence.⁴



Fig. 1 Aerial view of Castletown House

The building of Castletown began in 1722 and the house is a symbol of Conolly's wealth and importance. It was also built as a patriotic gesture in that as far as possible it was built by Irish craftsmen using Irish materials. It was in effect 'to be

² Boylan, Lena 'The Conollys of Castletown, A Family History' in *Irish Georgian Society Bulletin*, xi, no. 4 (Oct-Dec, 1968), pp1-46, p4.

³ The house at Rodanstown no longer exists and a nineteenth century house now stands in its place.

the epitome of the kingdom'.⁵ The building of Castletown which finished c.1725 must have given a great boost to the level of employment in the village of Celbridge. Unfortunately Speaker Conolly did not live long enough to see his great house completed, he died in 1729. The building and structural work at Castletown had been completed a few years earlier but the interior of the house had barely been started. It was not until the speaker's great nephew Tom Conolly and his wife Lady Louisa came to live at Castletown in 1759 that the interior decoration was completed. Lady Louisa would immediately set about the redecoration of Castletown House and the management and organisation of the 500 acre estate. The improvement of house and park became her main preoccupation. In her lifetime Castletown came to represent all that was comfortable and pleasant in an Irish country house.

Under Lady Louisa's direction the most important period in the decorative history of Castletown House began and she had a very organised approach towards the completion of the interior. The renovations at Castletown House represented a radical realtering of the internal design. In almost every room the position of the fireplace was changed, quite remarkable when one considers the fact that the chimney flues would have to be altered as well. It is a remarkable feature at Castletown House that all the chimney flues are gathered together into two large chimney stacks. Plasterwork ceilings and marble fireplaces were fitted, walls were painted, papered or hung with silk, doors were fitted and the main staircase was inserted. While this work was taking place, everyday life must have been somewhat difficult.

⁴ Hussey, Christopher 'Castletown House' in *Country Life* lxxx 15 August 1936, pp172-88, p174.

⁵ The Knight of Glin 'New Light on Castletown' *Irish Georgian Society Quarterly Bulletin*, viii, No. 1 (Jan-Mar, 1965), pp3-9, p9.

Castletown House is still very much the same house that Lady Louisa lovingly nurtured in the eighteenth century. It has not been significantly altered since the eighteenth century so that a sense of both its beloved mistress and that period is still apparent. Castletown, its contents and surrounding acres were sold at auction in the 1960s by Lord Conolly-Carew. He found in the house at that time a great collection of papers relating to the Conolly family and he distributed the papers between Trinity College, Dublin (TCD), the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) and the National Archive (NA). All three collections overlap at almost all points due to discrepancies in the original sort in 1966. What have now become known as the Castletown papers were accidentally left behind at the house, these were copied on microfilm by the National Library of Ireland (NLI) and PRONI with the permission of the Hon. Desmond Guinness. The house papers provide an insight into the development and completion of Castletown under the mistress-ship of Lady Louisa. They indicate that the changes were directly supervised by her. The surviving correspondence and accounts have provided the material for following the development of fashionable taste from 1759 to the end of the eighteenth century.

In the collection of Conolly papers in the Manuscript Library at TCD, there are several account books which reveal how the redecoration work went on in the 1760s and 1770s, the type of materials purchased and the tradesmen who were working in the house. Tom and Lady Louisa continued the decoration of Castletown House during those two decades and an interest in the decorative arts of the eighteenth century is reflected in the papers. Included in this collection are the personal account books of Tom and Lady Louisa Conolly dating from 1766-1806. Also included are

household account books from the same period. The accounts record payments to tradesmen; for gilding, masonry, plastering and slating, for upholstery and so on.

The Irish Architectural Archive has an abundant file of plans, maps, letters, bills and so on, relating to Castletown House. The plans of the house which are held there show the house prior to the 1760s and indeed after Lady Louisa's decoration so it was useful to compare the two sets of plans and see, for instance, the new placings of the fireplaces which in some cases were moved from one side of the room to the other. In 1994 David Griffin of the Irish Architectural Archive was commissioned by the Office of Public Works (OPW) to shape an architectural report on Castletown House. This is in seven volumes and includes information on all aspects of the house architecturally. In this report Griffin has outlined various details about the architectural and decorative features of the house.

The main source for this thesis however, has been the personal correspondence of Lady Louisa Conolly, letters written to her sisters and indeed, letters written between her sisters which provide a detailed account of the work at the house and what Louisa's intentions were. Lady Louisa's letters to her sister Emily have been published in *The correspondence of Emily, duchess of Leinster* (in three volumes), edited by Brian Fitzgerald, the originals however, are contained at the NLI.⁶ Her letters to her sister, Lady Sarah were, in their original form, with the Irish Georgian Society, these however have disappeared but typed copies are kept at Castletown House. For the purposes of this study, these letters shall be referred to as the

⁶ Lady Louisa Conolly's letters to the countess of Kildare (later duchess of Leinster), (NLI, The Fitzgerald correspondence, Ms 611-4)

Castletown House letters. These letters are in most cases dated but are not catalogued. Included with this correspondence are letters from Lady Louisa to her brother, the third duke of Richmond; to her sister, the countess of Kildare; to her niece, Emily Napier and others; also letters from Emily Napier to various people and a letter written by Lady Louisa's nephew George Napier concerning her death in 1821. The correspondence dates from 1759-1821. Unfortunately the letters which were sent to Lady Louisa no longer exist for she left 'a written direction for them to be burn't unopened when I am Dead.'⁷



Fig. 2 View of the north facade.

Much has been written about Castletown House, architecturally the most important house in Ireland, essentially an Irish house built by an Irish man. Thus there is an abundant amount of secondary information relating to Castletown, the Conolly family and Lady Louisa herself. Neither *Aristocrats* by Stella Tillyard (London, 1994) which details the lives of the Lennox sisters nor *Lady Louisa Conolly* by Brian Fitzgerald (Dublin, 1950) can be ignored in considering Lady Louisa's life. *Great*

⁷ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 26 Feb. 1766 (Castletown House letters).

Irish houses and castles (London, 1992) by Desmond Guinness and Jacqueline O'Brien and the earlier *Irish houses and castles* (London, 1971) by Desmond Guinness and William Ryan, describe Castletown in relation to other great Irish houses of the period. Maurice Craig's books on Irish architecture are very informative, in particular *The Architecture of Ireland from the earliest times to 1880* (Dublin, 1982).

Several bulletins of the Irish Georgian Society provide information on Castletown and the eighteenth century, in particular, 'New light on Castletown' by the Knight of Glin (1965) which asserted Galilei and Pearce as the architects of Castletown House. Lena Boylan's article 'The Conollys of Castletown' (1968) remains the most authoritative article on that family. In 1979 Ann Margaret Keller wrote an article about the long gallery at Castletown House dealing with the description, history, sources for the decoration and the problem of attribution of the masters of the gallery and still quoted as the most conclusive study of this room. Recently the print room was the subject of an undergraduate thesis by Fiona Hunt (TCD, 1994) and the most recent study made on this delightful room.

Several articles about Castletown House have been published in the magazine, *Country Life*. Particular attention should be given to the articles by Maurice Craig, the Knight of Glin and John Cornforth in 1969. Studies by Christopher Hussey (1936) and Giles Worsley (1994) should also be considered.

Travellers accounts and correspondence letters from the eighteenth century are always useful as they give an eye witness account of the period. Arthur Young

writing in the 1770s in his 'A tour in Ireland 1776-79', declared that 'Castletown to which all travellers resort is the finest house in Ireland and not exceeded by many in England'. In 1776 Richard Twiss made his tour of Ireland, his subsequent 'A tour in Ireland' was infamous due to his unpopularity as he was scornful of nearly everything in Ireland. Writing of Castletown, he remarked that 'it is the only house in Ireland to which the term palace might be applied'. Lady Caroline Dawson (later Countess of Portarlington) visited Castletown in 1778 and wrote that 'it is the largest I ever was in and reckoned the finest in the kingdom. It has been done up entirely by Lady Louisa and with very good taste'.

As the eighteenth century progressed, society became less formal and as such Castletown was required to move with the times. The redecoration of the house represented a move from the formal house of the early eighteenth century to a house which welcomed the new informality evident in society after the mid-eighteenth century.

Chapter one deals with the early history of Castletown house and the Conolly family. The progression of William Conolly, from innkeeper's son to become the wealthiest and most powerful man in Ireland at the turn of the eighteenth century, his wife Katherine, their successors William and Lady Anne Conolly and then Tom and Lady Louisa Conolly. This chapter also deals with the building of the house, designed by the architects Alessandro Galilei and Edward Lovett Pearce, and the beginnings of the interior decoration.

The central matter for discussion is dealt with in chapter two. It traces the decoration of the interior of Castletown from 1759-1776, a period of only seventeen years during which the house was completely transformed. It deals in particular with the staircase hall, dining room, red and green drawing rooms, print room and long gallery.

The final chapter is an attempt to present a brief biography of that remarkable young woman who radically realtered Castletown House, Lady Louisa Conolly. It traces her life from her early childhood in England through seven years living at Carton House with her sister, Emily and over sixty years as the mistress of perhaps, the finest house in Ireland.

Castletown House had a remarkable influence on the shape and layout of the Irish country house for many years to come but in terms of size and grandeur it has never been equalled.

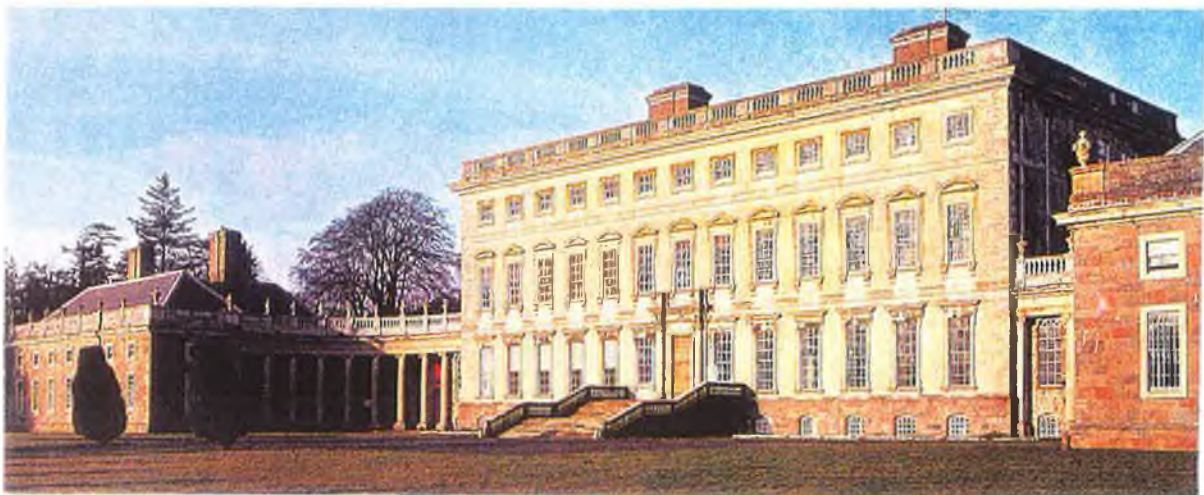


Fig. 3 View of the facade from the south-east.

Chapter One

The Conolly family and the early history of Castletown House

Speaker William Conolly was born in 1662 of humble origins in Ballyshannon, County Donegal, the son of an alehouse or inn keeper. It appears that his family conformed to the established church sometime before William's birth probably in his grandfather's time. This greatly aided the Conolly children in gaining an education. Like most innkeepers in the north of Ireland in the seventeenth century, the Conollys prospered. William appears to have been the eldest in the family and Patrick, his father, arranged for him to be apprenticed to the law in Dublin at the age of fifteen. In 1685 when his sister Jane was barely a year old, William was already qualified as an attorney and was attached to his Majesty's Court of Common Pleas. In 1692 he was elected MP for the borough of Donegal and in 1698 he received his first public



Fig. 4 Speaker William Conolly by Charles Jervas

Conolly amassed his great fortune by dealing in forfeited estates after the Williamite revolution of 1690-1. He was appointed commissioner of the revenue in 1709 and was unanimously elected speaker of the Irish house of commons in 1715, a position he would hold until ill health forced him to resign just two weeks before his death in 1729. In 1717 Conolly was named one of the three lord justices chosen to administer the government of the country in the absence of the lord lieutenant.⁷ These three offices of speaker, lord justice and commissioner of the revenue had never before been held by one individual simultaneously. As speaker, Conolly influenced proceedings in the house of commons and made his goodwill vitally necessary to government, as lord justice he showed that he retained the trust of the

⁷ Boylan, 'The Conollys of Castletown' p6.

ministry and as commissioner of the revenue he had a source of patronage that he was able to use as much as he liked. In spite of these positions, Conolly never took a title, proud, as were his descendants after him to be called 'Mr Conolly of Castletown'.



Fig. 5 Katherine Conolly with a niece by Charles Jervas

Conolly was married in 1694 to Katherine Conyngham, eldest daughter of Sir Albert Conyngham, a Williamite general of ordnance in Ireland. She brought with her to the union a marriage portion of £2,300 for which her new husband settled on her his first estate purchases - Rodanstown (purchased 1691), Dolanstown and Batterstown in the barony of Deece, County Meath amounting to some 1,427 acres.⁸ William's marriage to Katherine allied him to some of the most powerful families in the north of the country. Speaker Conolly died at their town house on Capel Street in Dublin in 1729 and to the end he supported Irish rights. During his political career he opposed the appointment of British officials to posts in the Irish administration and

recommended those qualified who were of Irish birth to successive lords lieutenant. Katherine, who survived him by twenty three years, had always shared her husband's political interests and after his death people continued to flock to Capel Street and indeed to Castletown to enlist her support.



Fig. 6 The Obelisk (1740) and the Wonderful Barn (1743).

Katherine was a remarkable woman and in the years after his death she continued to perpetuate the speaker's memory but unfortunately she lost interest in the house at Castletown and so did not continue with the work that he had started. With William Conolly, the speaker's nephew, she completed the purchase of land set aside by her husband for the erection of the charity school in Celbridge in accordance with his will. During the 1740s because of her concern for the hardship imposed on the people of the neighbourhood by the environment, she had the obelisk or Conolly Folly built in 1740 and the Wonderful Barn in 1743, though this was built to protect the

⁸ Ibid. p4.

built in 1740 and the Wonderful Barn in 1743, though this was built to protect the grain stores of the estate as well. Katherine died at Castletown in 1752. Mrs Delany¹⁰ wrote reporting her loss;

We have lost our great Mrs Conolly. She died last Friday and is a general loss.

Her table was open to all her friends of all ranks and her purse to the poor.....

She was a plain and vulgar woman in her manner; but had very valuable qualities.¹¹

Speaker Conolly was already sixty years of age when he began to build his great house at Celbridge but as his marriage to Katherine had produced no children, Castletown was not built to house a large family. It was built really to display the wealth he had gathered throughout a lengthy career. At the time the house was built he was believed to have been not only the wealthiest but the most powerful man in Ireland. The house was built not only as a symbol of his wealth but also of his importance, and to an extent as a patriotic gesture using Irish craftsmen and Irish materials. Castletown House was the first country house in Ireland to be built of stone in the classical manner, with curved colonnades and so setting a fashion to be followed elsewhere. Previously houses had been made of brick. It was designed in part by two architects, firstly the Italian Alessandro Galilei (1691-1731) to whom the main facade is attributed and secondly to Edward Lovett Pearce (1699-1733) the young Irish architect, who completed the house designing the floor plans and adding on the two wings. The west wing housed the kitchen and the east wing the stables, and the idea of creating yards behind both wings to service the kitchen and stables

¹⁰ Mary Granville (1700-88) married Dr Patrick Delany, Dean of Down in 1743; a great chronicler, through her correspondence, of society in the eighteenth century.

entrance hall and the original 1720s decoration of the long gallery on the first floor upstairs.



Fig. 7 View of the central block of Castletown.

In 1719, Galilei, a Florentine was brought to England and then to Ireland by John Molesworth of Brackenstown.¹¹ It has been established that Galilei designed the elevations of Castletown House and perhaps also the plan of the main block.¹² He may have sketched out a general conception of curved colonnades and wings before returning to Italy later that same year. In a letter from Robert Molesworth to Galilei in June 1719, Molesworth sheds light on the lack of interest in building in Ireland before the palladian invasion of Pearce and Castle¹³ in the following decade, he wrote ‘Mr Conolly is going on with his designs and no doubt would be glad of your advice

¹⁰ Day, Angeliq (ed.) *Letters from Georgian Ireland. The Correspondence of Mary Delany 1731-1768* (Belfast, 1991) p53.

¹¹ John Molesworth (1679-1726), eldest son and successor to Robert Molesworth (below), died a few months after succession to title and succeeded by brother Richard.

¹² Knight of Glin ‘New Light on Castletown’ pp3-9.

now and then, and truly of all your employers has shown himself most generous'.¹⁴

Among Galilei's remaining sketches is a working scheme for a large eleven-bay Roman palace type mansion with palladian colonnades and kitchen and stable blocks that certainly could be a preliminary sketch for Castletown. The drawing relates to no other Galilei project even though the drawing relates to an eleven bay house while Castletown House is thirteen bay. Further indication of Galilei's involvement lies in a letter from Lady Elizabeth Seymour which dates from the early 1760s, 'Gallini' can refer to no one other than Galilei himself;

To Castletown it stands on a flat, the shell of the house is good it was designed by Gallini the Pope's architect who after built the Pope's Palace on Mount Palatine in Rome it is built of stone not good house with Hall a Cube of 30F built by Speaker Conolly¹⁵

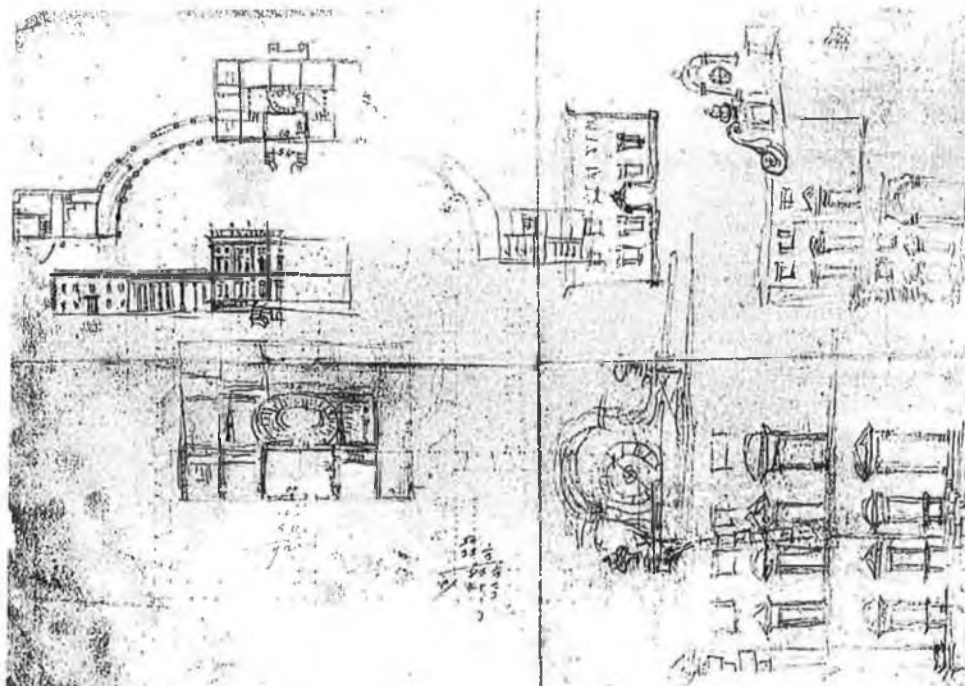


Fig. 8 Plans by Galilei which may relate to Castletown.

¹³ Richard Castle or Cassels (c.1690-1751) German architect who settled in Ireland in 1724.

¹⁴ Robert Molesworth (1656-1725), first Viscount Molesworth, 1719; quoted in Maurice Craig, The Knight of Glin and John Cornforth, 'Castletown, Co. Kildare I, II and III' in *Country Life* cxlv 27 March, 3 and 10 April 1969 pp722-6, 798-801 and 882-5.

¹⁵ Guinness, Desmond and Lines, Charles 'Castletown House' for the Irish Georgian Society c. 1970 (Irish Architectural Archive, ref. RP.D.79.6).

Edward Lovett Pearce began his career in the army. His father Edward was a general and a first cousin of John Vanbrugh.¹⁶ The young Edward came under the tutelage of Vanbrugh after the death of his father in 1715. Pearce was related by cousinhood to many of the foremost families who were involved in building either officially or on their own account both in Dublin and the provinces. In the early 1720s Pearce was in close contact with the Burlington circle of architects and leaders of taste.¹⁷ Pearce spent three years travelling in Italy and France as a student of architecture. He was in correspondence with Galilei while in Italy and was probably acting on behalf of Speaker Conolly. It appears likely that Pearce was in Italy in 1723 and there met Galilei. It is however believed that they were already acquainted for Galilei was working for Vanbrugh at Kimbolton Castle in England, a residence for the duke of Manchester in 1719, where he designed the portico.¹⁸



Fig. 9 View of the west colonnade and wing.

¹⁶ John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), soldier, playwright, herald and outstanding English baroque architect - every building he designed is stamped with his own unique personality and he was an architect of genius; knighted in 1714.

¹⁷ The Burlington Circle was led by Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington (1694-1753), who was the patron of English palladianism.

¹⁸ Knight of Glin, 'New Light on Castletown' p6.

The building of Castletown House is described in the correspondence between Bishop Berkeley and Sir John Perceval.²⁰ In July 1722 Berkeley wrote;

The most remarkable thing now going on is a house of Mr Conolly's at Castletown.....It is to be of fine wrought stone, harder and better coloured than the Portland, with outhouses joining to it by colonnades, etc. The plan is chiefly of Mr Conolly's invention, however, in some points they are pleased to consult me. I hope it will be an ornament to the country²¹

Perceval replied in August;

I am glad for the honour of my country that Mr Conolly has undertaken so magnificent a pile of building, and your advice has been taken upon it..... for since this house will be the finest Ireland ever saw, and by your description fit for a Prince, I would have it as it were the epitome of the kingdom, and all the natural rarities she afford should have a place there²²

He goes on in this letter to suggest the use of oak or walnut for panelling and wainscoting, the type of furniture, use of silver and so on but stressing that all materials should be Irish in origin. Berkeley answered Perceval's letter that September;

I shall give you then the best account I can of Mr Conolly's house, in the meantime

²⁰ George Berkeley (1685-1753), Bishop of Cloyne; Sir John Perceval (1683-1748), first earl of Egmont in Irish peerage 1733.

²¹ Knight of Glin, 'New Light on Castletown' p 5.

²² *ibid.* p 9.

I shall give you then the best account I can of Mr Conolly's house, in the meantime you will be surprised to hear that the building is began and the cellar floor arched before they have agreed on any plan for the elevation facade. Several have been made by several hands but as I do not approve of a work conceived by many heads so I have made no draught of mine own. All I do being to give my opinion on any point, when consulted²³

The house was unfinished when seen by John Loveday in 1732, he did however in his *Diary of a tour in 1732 through parts of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland* describe the house and interior as they were;

Just out of Kildroghan is much ye grandest house we have seen in Ireland - Castletown, Mrs Conolly's, built in 1725 of a bastard marble dug up fifteen miles hence; but, being unpolished, it looks like a fair white stone. This very lofty and deep house, taking up a great deal of ground, stands upon arches. It has no less than thirteen windows in front, too many either for beauty or strength. On each side wind in a circular manner stone cloisters supported on columns of the ionic order. Butting the extremities of the cloisters, on one side the kitchen and offices; on t'other, ye stabling. The rooms are large and well-proportioned, and as well-furnished; though the inside be not finished throughout, for the great staircase is not yet begun, and some of the rooms have no furniture, as the long gallery, proportionately wideThe garrets, or rather rooms in the upper storey, are exceeding good apartments, all wainscoted and well-furnished. The chimney-pieces are of the marble the house is built of, which polished gives a grey cast.²⁴

²³ *ibid.* p 5.

²⁴ Fitzgerald, Brian *Lady Louisa Conolly 1743-1821: An Anglo Irish biography* (London, 1950), p20.

The house was then a very plain structure; in fact none of the plaster ornament dates much before 1760.

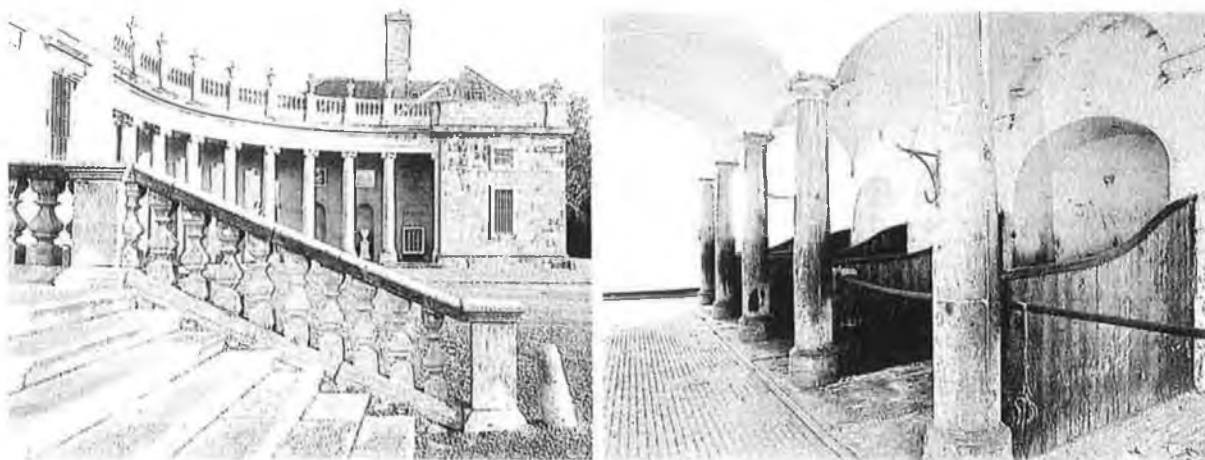


Fig. 10 Exterior and interior views of the east wing.

Pearce was undoubtedly the architect of the colonnades and wings at Castletown House as they were when seen by John Loveday. He designed the entrance hall, layout and probably most of the rest of the interior excepting the main staircase which was a later feature. However the place of the main staircase was assigned from the beginning. The lower order in the hall is ionic like that of the colonnades. Similarly the niches in the hall relate in design to those in the colonnades. In plan form the hall set a precedent for many later Irish houses; Cashel Palace, Castle Dobbs, Castle Ward, Lucan and all its relations.²⁴ The essence of the entrance hall at Castletown is a columnar screen at the inner end and because the hall is (exceptionally) two storeys high, a screen carries the corridor across at first floor level. While the lower order in the hall is ionic, above it in place of an order is a series of pilasters tapering towards

²⁴ Cashel Palace, Co. Tipperary, built 1730-2 for Archbishop Theophilus Bolton and designed by Edward Lovett Pearce; Castle Dobbs, Co. Antrim, built 1730 for Arthur Dobbs, surveyor general of Ireland in the manner of Edward Lovett Pearce; Castle Ward, Co. Down, built 1760-73 for Bernard Ward, afterwards first viscount Bangor; Lucan House, Co. Dublin, rebuilt 1770s for Agmondisham Vesey who was his own architect but consulted Chambers amongst others.

pedestals at the bottom, with carved wooden baskets of flowers and fruit in place of capitals at the top. These carvings are painted white which makes them appear as if they are made of plaster. Each pilaster is carefully positioned above the corresponding ionic column or columnar pilaster beneath. At first floor level the gallery ironwork is probably original to the building of the house but it is mounted with a later Victorian polished brass rail. From Vanbrugh, came Pearce's use of a corridor in the plan, indeed the central axial corridor at Castletown is said to have been one of the first of its kind employed in Ireland. Pearce died in 1733 but by the time of his death he had transformed the face of architecture in Ireland.²⁵

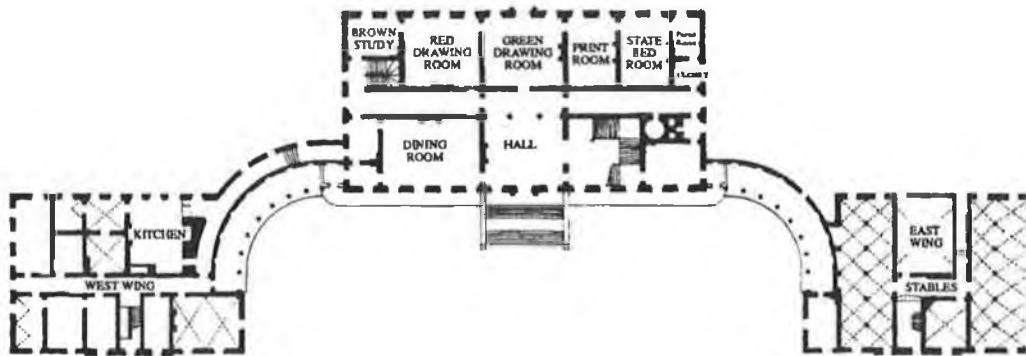


Fig. 11 Plan of the ground floor.

Letters between Pearce and Galilei in 1724 confirm not only their association with one another but also with Castletown. Pearce wrote in April 'I writ you twice from Bologna desiring you would send draftings of the palace to me, at your price...'²⁶ which surely refers to Castletown. Galilei replied;

the day afore yesterday I was favoured with two of your letters....the drawings are very

²⁵ Craig, Maurice *The architecture of Ireland from the earliest times to 1880* (Dublin, 1982)

²⁶ Knight of Glin, 'New Light on Castletown' p 6

well packed up within a blow pipe and can by no means come to any damage, but you must take care in taking them out; I have sent you both the forefront and the front of the court and have charged you for them both but seven pistols, for with such a friend as I take you to be I do not intend to stand all strictness.... I hope you will get everything safe and in time enough to serve your purpose. The brass statues you told me of are not to be sold; but if ever Mr Conolly resolved to have them statues made in brass I would get them done better and for less money than they would cost²⁷

With the mention of Conolly, it appears likely that the plans referred to were for Castletown. On his return from Europe, Pearce took over at Castletown and this is borne out by the existence of three drawings in the Elton Hall collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

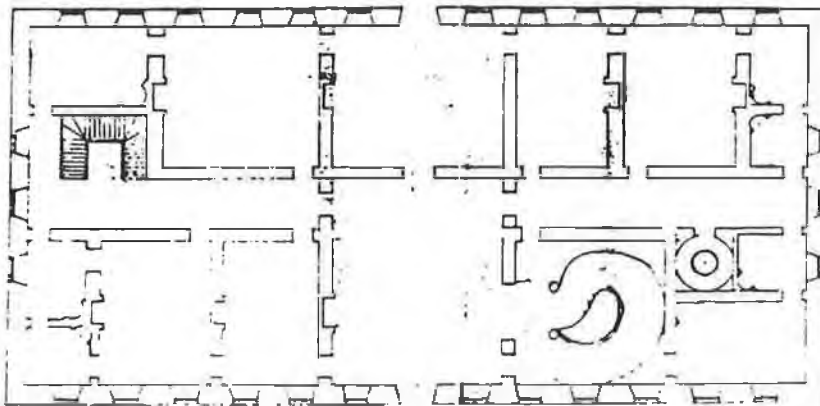


Fig. 12 Ground floor plan by Edward Lovett Pearce.

The central block at Castletown is thirteen bays wide and uninterrupted by any breakfront or pediment. The idea of a facade of thirteen windows with three windows had its precedent in the Farnese palace.²⁸ The facade suggests inspiration by some

²⁷ Ibid. p 6.

²⁸ Renaissance palace in Rome designed by Antonio da Sangallo and begun in 1534.

fine street facade of the high renaissance.³⁰ It is decorated on the ground floor only by consoled window cases and surmounting frieze and cornice, and on the first floor by alternating segmental and triangular window pediments. The central block resembles an Italian town palace and was undoubtedly the first example of such a classical revival in the British Isles. Castletown was made fashionably palladian by its badoer like colonnades³¹ leading to a pair of wings of an-up to-date English palladian type. The block is in a silvery white limestone, very fine in texture and somewhat resembling portland stone. Its origins are so far unidentified but it is believed to be a relatively local stone. The wings are of a coarser limestone but rich in subtle tints of pink, brown and blue, said to be from a quarry near Navan in County Meath. Castletown House, the first stone palace in the Italian style in Ireland and with its extended front of flanking colonnades and wings remains unparalleled as the most magnificent mansion in Ireland.³²

William Conolly was the son of Patrick Conolly, the Speaker's brother. It appears that Patrick was assisting his brother in the collection of rents in the 1690s, however he later moved to London where in 1705 the Speaker settled £2,000 on him 'in consideration of the love and affection which he hath for him and his wife Frances'.³³ In 1720 Speaker Conolly applied to the lord lieutenant, the duke of Bolton, for sinecure employment and cursitorship of chancery for his nephew William.³⁴ William was returned as MP for Ballyshannon in 1727 and he represented this borough until the year he died, 1754. He married in 1733, Lady Anne Wentworth,

³⁰ Hussey, 'Castletown House' p176.

³¹ The wings at Castletown are similar in function to the Villa Badoer in Italy designed by Palladio.

³² Craig, Knight of Glin and Cornforth 'Castletown, Co. Kildare I' *Country Life* p724.

³³ Boylan, Lena 'The Conollys of Castletown, A Family History' *Irish Georgian Society Bulletin* xi, No. 4 (Oct-Dec 1968), pp1-46, p15.

³⁴ *ibid.* p15.

daughter of Thomas Wentworth, the earl of Strafford. Earlier in November 1732, her aunt the Hon. Mrs Donellan wrote to her brother Strafford;

I hear Mr Conolly has property for one of your daughters (he is an) agreeable and a sensible gentleman and all the world knows he has a very good fortune and, what is above all, a sober man. He has a very good characterHe has a fine house to bring her to. You have three daughters; in my opinion, you can't dispose of one of them better than to him³⁵

The marriage would appear to have been a happy union as Lady Anne later wrote; 'Mr Conolly is so good to me that I am sure to reward anyone that had a hand in the match'.³⁶ The young couple arrived in Ireland in August 1733 and shared Castletown and the Capel Street house with Katherine until their own home at Leixlip Castle was ready.³⁷ Lady Anne wrote of Castletown House;

It is so very unfinished without doors, I don't think the place very pleasant, though the house is really a charming one to live in. The front is quite without ornaments of any sort, not even so much as pediments over the windows.....Altogether it looks very well; at least there it does where there are but few places anyway like a seat, and too they all have one fault and that is the want of trees, by which every place looks terrible raw and cold.³⁸

³⁵ Ibid. pp15-6.

³⁶ Ibid. p16.

³⁷ Leixlip Castle, Co. Kildare, four miles from Castletown, built in Norman times, altered in the eighteenth century and with an eighteenth century interior.

³⁸ Hussey, 'Castletown House' p173.



Fig. 13 View of Castletown from the south west. Note the difference in colour between the wing and the central block.

William Conolly held two seats in the English parliament, Aldborough (1734-47) and Petersfield (1747-54), no doubt aided in both by the influence of the Strafford family, most certainly in the case of the former. Whilst in England the Conollys resided at Stretton Hall in Staffordshire in England, which they bought in the late 1740s and while he sat in the English parliament, the family divided their time between both of their estates. They moved to Castletown when Katherine died in 1752 but lived there only briefly as William died two years later in 1754. Lady Anne decided to return to live in England at Stretton Hall - she was after all an English lady by birth and her family lived there. Thus William and Lady Anne were not at the

house long enough to undertake any of the plans they may have set out. In his will William charged his executors to keep in good and sufficient repair the house, gardens and improvements at Castletown and to lay out such sums as their discretion deemed necessary for that purpose until his only son, Thomas Conolly, reached the age of twenty one, a year after his death.



Fig. 14 Tom and Lady Louisa Conolly, both portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Tom Conolly had been born at Leixlip Castle in 1734, the second child of William and Lady Anne. Three years after coming of age, in 1758, Tom Conolly married Lady Louisa Lennox, fifteen years of age and the third daughter of Charles, second duke of Richmond. She was one of the famous Lennox sisters who were renowned beauties in the eighteenth century. Lady Louisa's parents had both died by the time she had reached the age of eight and shortly after her mother's death in 1751, she and her sisters Lady Sarah aged six and Lady Cecilia, a baby, were sent to live in Ireland with their elder sister Lady Emily who had some four years earlier married James

Fitzgerald, the foremost peer in Ireland, the twentieth earl of Kildare. Lady Louisa was reared at Carton House in Maynooth, Co. Kildare, only about four or five miles from Castletown, with the young Fitzgeralds, and there she helped her sister Emily, the countess of Kildare to manage the household at Carton and choose the furnishings. Under the influence of James Fitzgerald, earl of Kildare, the young Lennox sisters developed a real affection and sympathy for Ireland, the country of their adoption. Lady Louisa would later be introduced by Lady Emily to Thomas Conolly, he was nine years her senior and aged twenty four when they married, but already at that age he was the wealthiest commoner and had the largest personal connection of any individual in the Irish house of commons.



Fig. 15 Lady Emily Lennox before her marriage and James Fitzgerald, earl of Kildare by Alan Ramsey.

Lord and Lady Kildare always held the opinion that Irish landlords should reside in Ireland and very much encouraged Tom and Lady Louisa to do so. Tom and Lady

Louisa spent the first months of their marriage in England where Lady Louisa made her debut and they finally settled at Castletown in about October 1759. In Lady Louisa's lifetime Castletown came to represent all that was comfortable in an Irish country house.

Lady Louisa found at Castletown a house that was scarcely decorated on the interior. The rooms were panelled with wood, mostly oak and had plain coved ceilings and many had no doors. The rooms that had doors, had doors of oak and they were tall and narrow, similar ones can still be seen in the brown study. The original doors were taller and narrower than the doors that Lady Louisa would later put in place. In the doorway from the brown study to the red drawing room, the difference in height between the new 1760s mahogany doors and the older 1720s oak doors can be seen. The doorway in the brown study is about ten inches taller than that on the other side in the red drawing room. In most cases the earlier fireplaces were of a plain design, for the most part those at Castletown today date to Lady Louisa's refurbishment.

There was no main staircase, just a bare plastered two-storey space. The entrance hall by Pearce was however in place and the white colour scheme and the black and white marble floor had been continued from the entrance hall, into what was to be the staircase hall. Before this, both the Conollys and the servants alike would have used either of the two end staircases, the stone staircase at the west side of the axial corridor or the wooden staircase on the east. Lady Louisa would set about a major plan for the redecoration of Castletown, a plan which started at the time of her arrival

in 1759 and lasted through the 1760s and the 1770s culminating in the decoration of Lady Louisa's masterpiece, the long gallery on the first floor of the house.



Fig. 16 The upper part of the entrance hall.

Tom inherited his father's debts and was accountable for his sisters' portions, the whole amounting to £124,000. By 1773 he had reduced the debt to £43,000, but during his lifetime he added £42,000 of his own leaving debts of some £85,000 to his heirs. There were the expenses as a leading public figure and MP which were high, a social life in Dublin and London and his sporting interests. Also there was the cost of improving and running Castletown. £25,000 was spent on alterations and improvements to the house in which Lady Louisa played a prominent part. Tom wrote later of his spending, in 1773; 'I had no reason to save money, having no

children, and I flatter myself that the money I have spent annually was rationally employed by living, not extravagantly, but like a gentleman.³⁹

Tom Conolly represented Malmesbury (1759-1768) and Chichester (1768-1784) in the English house of commons, and in the Irish parliament he sat for Co. Londonderry (1761-1800). In neither house did he distinguish himself but because of his wealth and connections he had a great influence in Ireland where he held various offices namely lord of the treasury, commissioner of trade and lieutenant of the county of Londonderry. He was sworn of the privy council in 1762. Tom Conolly had a great appetite for Irish politics, but a very poor digestion;⁴⁰ full of ideas and opinions, he pursued a will of the wisp policy which at times aggravated his friends on both sides of the house, but never himself for it was his greatest boast that he was always strictly independent. The act of union extinguished his political career, he handed over his seat and retired to Castletown.

Whilst his political career may not have been very productive, he was respected and well liked especially in sporting circles. In April 1803 after Tom's death, Colonel Napier wrote;

This once happy house is now the mansion of deep and solid woe. Wednesday last at 5pm terminated the earthly existence of Mr Conolly and I am just returned from committing to the grave all that remains of an honest man. I speak from thirty four years experience, during which long period I never knew a human being whose

³⁹ Quoted in the catalogue introduction to TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3974-84.

⁴⁰ Boylan, 'The Conollys of Castletown' p23.

enemies were more transient and whose friendships were more permanent.⁴¹

One sensible piece of advice is contained within Thomas Conolly's will;

I hope and recommend to the persons who will be entitled to my estate, that they will be resident in Ireland, and will always prove steady friends to Ireland, as their ancestor, Mr Speaker Conolly, the original and honest maker of my fortune was.⁴²

⁴¹ *ibid.* p42.

⁴² Fitzgerald, Lord Walter 'Castletown and its owners' in JKAS, ii (1896-9), pp360-78, p375.

Chapter Two

The alterations made to Castletown House 1759-76

Tom Conolly and Lady Louisa Lennox were married at the end of 1758 and for a while there was some speculation as to whether they would settle at Castletown House or indeed in Ireland. The Kildares actively encouraged them to reside in Ireland. Emily was especially concerned and wrote to her husband, the earl;

I am afraid by all that I hear that Conolly does not intend being here next winter for any time. Now nobody has more power with him than you, and I wish you wou'd represent both to Louisa and him how necessary it is for them to settle their affairs here, and how much better that would be done by bringing their family and coming for some time than just to hurry over for a couple of months. I am quite miserable about it, do pique his pride by telling of what *consequence* he may be of here.⁴³

⁴³ Countess of Kildare to Earl of Kildare, 12 May 1759, published in Fitzgerald, Brian (Ed) *Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster 1731-1814* i (Dublin, 1949), (hereafter cited as Leinster Letters i), p84.

The earl replied,

As to Conolly's living in Ireland, everyone says that he certainly will.....I think Lady Louisa seem[s] more inclined for settling here [England] than he do's.....but they are both so young that they don't know what they are about.⁴⁴

The young couple were obviously convinced and after a brief but lively period in England they finally settled in Ireland in 1759. The couple had originally considered demolishing the house at Castletown and starting afresh; by the 1760s the design and layout of the house was considered old fashioned. The earl of Kildare, however, persuaded them not to demolish and explained, 'I told Lady Louisa that when she came to live here after the alterations were made, that she would be obliged to me for finding out that the alterations could be made without pulling down the house.'⁴⁵



Fig. 17 View of Castletown House from south west

⁴⁴ Earl of Kildare to Countess of Kildare, 21 May 1759, *Leinster letters* i, p90.

⁴⁵ Tillyard, Stella *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox 1740-1832* (London, 1994) p201.

When Lady Louisa Conolly arrived at Castletown, she was fifteen years of age and recently married. She immediately set about organising her household, 'your advice as to looking and knowing what is done in the house has already made me think a great deal about it.'⁴⁶ Castletown House was a huge shell of a building, little had been done with its interior since Speaker Conolly's death in 1729. The re-altering of Castletown House between 1759 and 1776 was not only desirable to a youthful couple like Tom and Louisa but also required. Like society in England, they were obliged to hold assemblies⁴⁷ and balls for which it was necessary for great numbers of people to move about in decorative and light-hearted interconnecting rooms. Thus the over-scaled proportions, grand orders and the profusion of oaken woodwork was largely replaced. The formal attitudes of society were changing, a polite society took its place. The mood of the period was captured by the light hearted *rocaille*⁴⁸ ornamentation which ushered in the new social spirit.

Society was changing and with it, so too was the function of the house. Earlier in the eighteenth century the hall had been a room for great dinners, the saloon for grand ones. Once the saloon had ceased to be used for formal meals, its position as the ceremonial pivot of the house had gone. The reasons for putting the saloon in the centre of the house with a great portico in front of it had also gone. The formal house had ceased to work. The drama of the early eighteenth century succession of rooms which led from hall to bed chamber was abandoned. The progress of a guest through each of these rooms was indicative of that person's importance or familiarity with the family. Instead of a hall and saloon between apartments which were the private

⁴⁶ Lady Louisa to countess of Kildare, 4 Oct. 1759, (Castletown House Letters).

territories of the people occupying them, what was now needed was a series of communal rooms for entertaining, which were exclusive of the hall and all running into each other. What was now required at Castletown was a circuit to take the visitor from the hall to the green drawing room (formerly the saloon) to red drawing room (formerly the with-drawing room) through the brown study and out onto the gallery corridor. The visitor returned then via the hall and gained access to the dining room (formerly an apartment). It was the social parts of the house rather than the private territories which now dominated the eighteenth century house but they dominated however, in a comparatively easy-going way, in sympathy with the general reaction against formality. Everyday social life was no longer a kind of round game in which everyone joined in together, different people could now do different things at the same time and even in the same room. People could drift together and separate, form groups and break them up, in an easy informal way.

In a formal house individual rooms were likely to need quick rearranging, depending as to whether they were to be used for meals, cards, conversation or dancing. Chairs were normally kept lined along the walls and were moved into the required positions by servants. Eating tables were often of a folding type so they could be put up and taken down with ease. As the century progressed and houses then had a string of informal rooms, each room tended to be put to a more limited set of uses; dining rooms were now for eating in and nothing else, the dining table was now permanently in the centre of the room. In the living rooms, chairs and sofas remained in frozen positions suitable for conversation or in groups. This new informality and 'lounging

¹⁷ Assembly - a general meeting of the polite persons of both sexes for the sake of conversation, gallantry, news and play in Girourard, *Life in the English country house* (London, 1979), p191.

life' encouraged softer upholstery and therefore heavier and less mobile furniture.⁴⁹

The house that Lady Louisa created at Castletown reflected this move from formality to informality.

The manner in which the floor plan at Castletown House is designed provides an enfilade of rooms at the back of the house. These were the rooms which during Lady Louisa's period were used for the entertaining and reception of guests. This arrangement of rooms leading into one another, all linked together is typical of the houses of the period. What was unique at Castletown, was the central axial corridor. This in effect divides the house in two, the rooms are situated off this passage, the idea had come from Pearce who had in turn borrowed it from his cousin Vanbrugh, (above page 21).

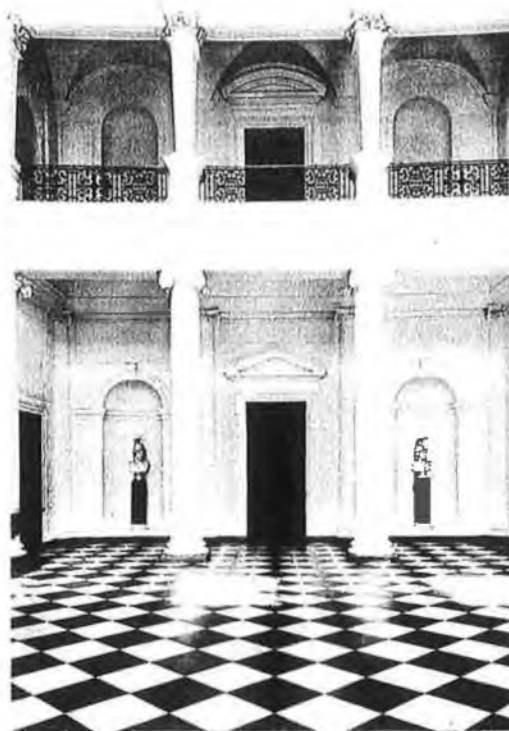


Fig. 18 The entrance hall.

⁴⁸ Synonym of rococo, especially in its more extravagant versions.

⁴⁹ Girourard, *Life in the English country house* p239.

The entrance hall at Castletown House is but a mere suggestion of the grandeur which lies within. As already stated (above page 20), its decoration dates to the 1720s, Lady Louisa obviously favoured it because the hall was never altered. It is a large two storeyed plastered space with a black and white marble floor. The decoration in the entrance hall was designed by Pearce, the plaster panelling, cornice, dado, ceiling, shutters and so on, it appears that the only alterations made to this area were the 1760s mahogany doors and window sashes.⁵⁰ While the entrance hall was in place the staircase hall leading off from it to the east did not yet exist. This space had been empty for almost forty years. In formal houses of the early eighteenth century where the hall, saloon and main apartments had all been on the same floor as at Castletown, staircases had tended to be relatively utilitarian. Lady Louisa, however, decided that a great house like Castletown should have a great staircase. Here Lady Louisa found a bare two-storeyed space waiting for the insertion of a staircase. The black and white marble floor with black border was already in place having been continued from the outer hall and it seems likely that the colour of this inner hall, white, would have been decided by the already decorated entrance hall. A payment recorded in 1783 to Richard Jenkinson of £8 for 'whitening the walls of the Great Hall and Staircase',⁵¹ it is evident thus that the halls have always been painted white, as they still are today. The place of the main staircase had been assigned from the beginning and the old house plan shows a circular staircase rising from between two columns which would presumably support the first floor landing.⁵² Prior to its erection, the Conollys would have used one of the two staircases found at either end

⁵⁰ Griffin, David *Castletown, Co. Kildare; an architectural report prepared for the Office of Public Works* (Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin, 1994) 7 vols., (no page numbers given); iii Ground floor (hereafter cited as Griffin report iii).

⁵¹ Castletown account book 1779-1784, at Castletown House (not foliated).

⁵² Griffin report iii.

of the central axial corridor. These two staircases run from the basement level up to the second floor.



Fig. 19 The staircase hall.

The main staircase at Castletown is cantilevered, that is self supporting. While it is partially built into the walls which are some two to three feet thick, it also relies on balance. Each step overlaps slightly as it ascends so that each step is supported by that which went before, essentially, the entire structure rests on the first step. In the absence of a main architect associated with the house at that time, Lady Louisa supervised much of the work herself. The main contractor for the staircase was

Simon Vierpyl,⁵³ who would later work on the in the ground floor rooms, ‘Paid Mr Vierpyl, his Bill for the stair case, £180 5s 7d.’⁵⁴ It is more than possible that Chambers suggested using his protégé, Vierpyl for the work at Castletown. The staircase was not built until 1760 and Lady Louisa wrote in December that year, ‘Our staircase is finish’d all to putting up the banisters’.⁵⁵



Fig. 20 Detail of the banisters; note the maker's mark and date.

Another factor which determines the date of the staircase is the fact that three of the lower banisters are inscribed ‘A King Dublin 1760’. Mr King was the man who made the banisters for the staircase, the first in Ireland to use solid brass banisters. It appears that the staircase was not finished until 1763 and Tom recorded in his account book that he ‘Paid Mr King for Cleaning my Bannisters for five years ending

⁵³ Simon Vierpyl (c.1725-1810), sculptor who settled in Ireland in 1756.

⁵⁴ Tom Conolly's account book for 1766, 13 July 1766 (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3963, p9).

⁵⁵ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 15 Dec. 1760 (Castletown House letters).

April 1768'.⁵⁶ Mr King later became the lord mayor of Dublin.⁵⁷ Originally a large brass chandelier hung in the staircase hall presumably designed to match the banisters.⁵⁸

The plasterwork in the hall dates to the same period as the staircase but it was however started slightly earlier, as is evident in a letter from Lady Louisa to her sister Emily in 1759;

Mr Conolly and I are excessively diverted at Franchini's impertinence, and if he charges anything of that sort to Mr Conolly, there is a fine scold in store for his honour.....beg Mr Lombeck will not take any more denials from Franchini or any of the rest.⁵⁹

The reference to 'the rest' suggests that there was more work going on in the house than merely the work in the staircase hall. The alterations began that year in 1759. The correspondence of the 1760s would indicate that there was no overall plan for the reorganisation of the house, for the decoration of the house represents a variety of different styles, the rococo of the staircase hall, the neo-classicism of the dining room and drawing rooms, the playful print room culminating in the light hearted pompeiana of the long gallery. In her correspondence, Lady Louisa mentions the involvement of Vierpyl and Lafranchini and (from afar) of William Chambers.

⁵⁶ Tom Conolly's account book 1767-70, 6 Sept. 1768 (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3964, p34).

⁵⁷ From anonymous and undated document, copy at Castletown House.

⁵⁸ This chandelier fell down however some forty years ago, was sold and when sold melted down.

⁵⁹ Lady Louisa Conolly to her sister, the Countess of Kildare 28 May 1759; published in Fitzgerald, Brian (Ed) *Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster 1731-1814* iii (Dublin, 1957), (hereafter cited as *Leinster Letters* iii), p20.



Fig. 21 The staircase hall in 1936.

The plasterwork which decorates the walls of the staircase is by the Lafranchini brothers. The arrival in Ireland of these Swiss-Italian brothers, Paolo (1695-1770) and Filippo (1702-79) in 1739 brought about a flowering in the decorative arts, Dublin became famous for the richness and variety of stuccowork which was unequalled in extent by any other European city.⁶⁰ The Lafranchini brought with them the international late baroque style. However, by the time Castletown was decorated they had moved with the times into the new rococo style. They had worked throughout the country namely at Carton House in Maynooth, Russborough House, County Wicklow, houses on St Stephen's Green in Dublin and more. In fact the

⁶⁰ Palumbo-Fossati, Carlo 'The stuccoists Lafranchini in Ireland' in *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society* xxv (1982), pp3-18; pp8-14.

plasterwork at Castletown is reminiscent of the work at no. 9 St. Stephen's Green.⁶¹ Work on the plasterwork was started before that of the staircase which explains why, in places, it does not follow the line of the staircase. This work however, would continue long after the staircase was finished. An entry in Tom's account book from 1766 reads 'Paid Mr Franchini to Ballance his whole account of stucco at Castletown, £298 13s 3d'.⁶² It would appear, however that only one of the brothers worked at Castletown, Paolo was back in Switzerland when the staircase hall was being decorated.⁶³ In 1760 he is noted as being back home at Bironico in Switzerland and he never returned to Ireland.⁶⁴ In the account books of the house and indeed in the correspondence only Franchini or Lafranchini is mentioned, singular, for example 'Franchini's impertinence'.⁶⁵ From the words of this letter it appears that Filippo was working alone and thus was the decorator of the staircase hall. He was the younger of the two brothers, which perhaps made him more receptive to new styles, hence the rococo style evident at Castletown.

The staircase hall has its original 1720s coved ceiling with decoration added to the cove by the Lafranchini. It also has its original cornice, frieze and entablature. The upper shutters are original, the lower ones date to Lady Louisa's realtering when the windows at the front of the house were lengthened excepting the two either side of the front door. The carved architraves above the doors are probably original, the mahogany doors from the 1760s.⁶⁶ The door to the entrance hall from the staircase hall was probably open originally and the doors evident today were added later from

⁶¹ de Breffney, Brian 'The Lafanchini Brothers' *The GPA Irish Arts Review* (1988) pp212-21, p216.

⁶² Tom Conolly's account book for 1766, 4 Apr.1766 (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3963, p4).

⁶³ de Breffney, 'The Lafanchini Brothers', p218.

⁶⁴ Palumbo-Fossati, 'The stuccoists Lafranchini in Ireland', p9.

⁶⁵ Lady Louisa Conolly to her sister, the Countess of Kildare, 28 May 1759, Leinster letters iii, p20.

elsewhere (it is now a cupboard, doors having been added on both sides). Both floors have carved window architraves and some of the windows still have the original spun glass panes.⁶⁷

The plasterwork at Castletown includes motifs which illustrate the four seasons. They are represented by four portraits roundels, two on the piers between the windows and the other two either side of the arch. It appears likely that some of the ceiling decoration would date to the 1720s as it similar to that in the entrance hall and thus of Pearce's design. Included in the plasterwork are cameos of the family, Tom and Lady Louisa at the head of the stairs and opposite to them are James and Emily, the Earl and Countess of Kildare. On the adjacent wall is Lady Sarah, Louisa's younger sister. Here Lady Louisa chose her 'second' parents and her closest sister. Within the plasterwork are three frames which originally held three large paintings only one of which remains today 'The bear hunt' by Paul de Vos, a Flemish seventeenth century artist, the others, bacchic hunting scenes in the style of Boucher.⁶⁸ Here in the decoration was something for Tom; the hunting scenes and something for Lady Louisa; her family. The problem of dust disfiguring the ornaments of the walls was solved by the twice yearly employment of two men who in the 1760s were paid a half a crown for a day 'dusting the ornaments of the Great Hall and Staircase.'⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Griffin report iii.

⁶⁷ In the eighteenth century, to make panes of glass, a piece of molten glass was spun in order to flatten it and thus panes could be cut.

⁶⁸ Francois Boucher (1703-70) French rococo decorator and painter.

⁶⁹ Tom Conolly's account book for 1766, 4 Oct. 1766 (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3963, p25).

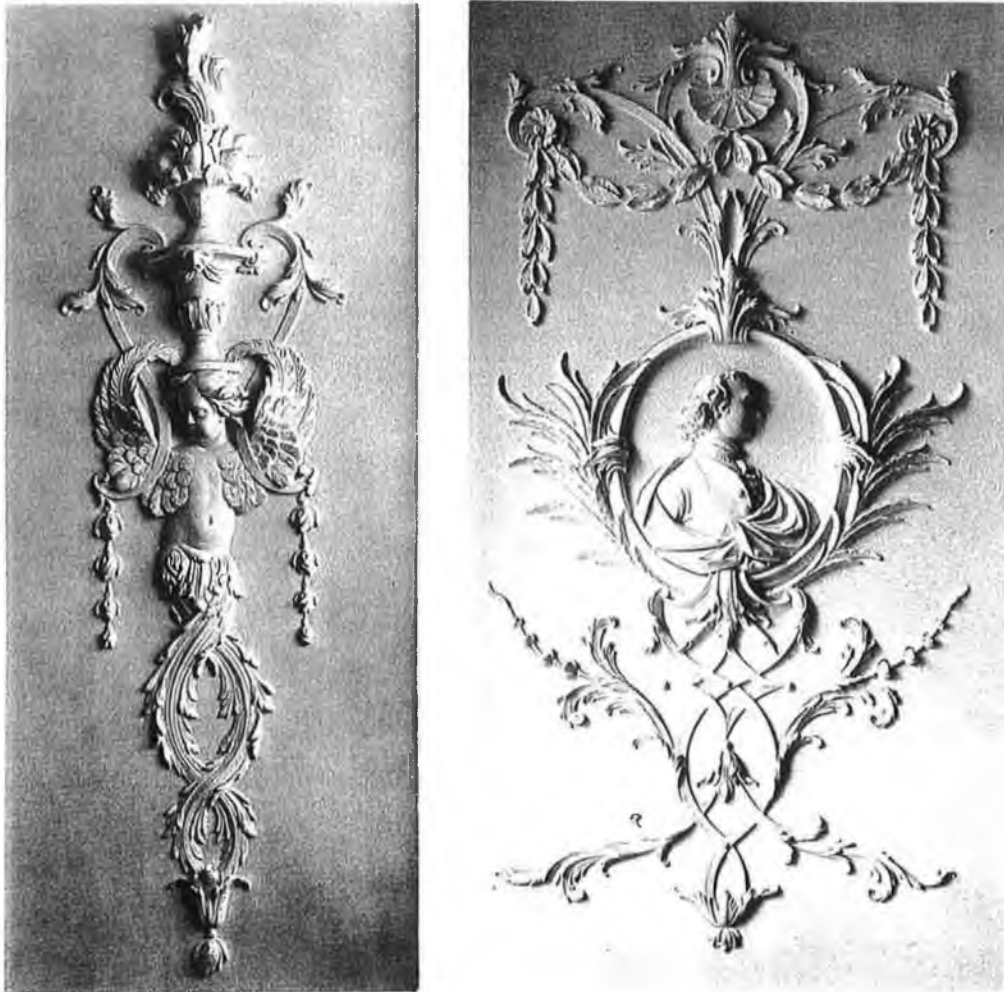


Fig. 22 Details of the plasterwork from the staircase hall including cameo of Tom Conolly.

From 1759, the work of redecorating the house was ongoing. Although Lady Louisa was in England for much of 1759 it seems that Emily supervised the work at Castletown in her absence, 'I am vastly happy to find you ...go to Castletown.....In one of your letters you mention that Mr Conolly had forgot to send over some of the finishing for the great room.'⁷⁰ A letter written in 1761 indicates that having made some changes the house was complete 'All the rooms are paper'd and look cheerful. I wish and would give anything in the world to have you

⁷⁰ Lady Louisa to the countess of Kildare, 28 July 1759, Leinster Letters iii, p23.

see them'.⁷¹ By 1762, the alterations were again underway, the earl of Kildare wrote to his wife, 'I am glad you are so well entertain'd at Castletown, where you say you have variety of men going backwards and forwards; I only fear that when I return you will find Carton stupid and dull.'⁷² Lady Louisa's correspondence recorded that her bedroom apartment was refitted in 1763, a prelude to her most ambitious alterations.

The new relaxed atmosphere and informality at Castletown extended to the new dining room. Earlier in the century, Katherine Conolly had dined in considerable state each day at three o'clock serving without variety seven courses and a dessert. While Lady Louisa dined later in the afternoon, it was a much more informal meal, 'the Gentlemen sat a good while after dinner, and we all got our works, and sat around the table and chatted.'⁷³



Fig. 23 The dining room.

⁷¹ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 18 June 1761 (Castletown House letters).

⁷² Earl of Kildare to Countess of Kildare, 20 Apr. 1762, Leinster letters i p119.

⁷³ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 29 Feb. 1768 (Castletown House letters).

The dining room was established by Lady Louisa in the early 1760s, previously the space was an apartment of rooms whose use dated to the speaker's time and it was used by either him or his wife Katherine. It had consisted of two larger rooms, one of which was used for sleeping and two closet rooms. This can be seen on the earlier plan of the house. The dividing wall between the two rooms was removed completely and so began the dining room. Lady Louisa, thus, had the two rooms converted into one and this alteration is one which still has implications for the house today in the 1990s. That modification has led to sagging floors and ceilings in the upper two floors and has left the 1760s plasterwork ceiling in the dining room somewhat vulnerable. It appears that the ceiling itself might have fallen at any time.⁷⁴ Thus while Lady Louisa had great plans and her work at Castletown can really be seen as a work of art, it seems that the renovations were not carried out to the highest architectural standards. The dining room had been established in this part of the house on the suggestion of the earl of Kildare. The earlier chimney pieces were removed from the west walls of the original rooms and replaced by one fireplace in the centre of the north wall. Originally there were two doors which led from the earlier rooms to the west corridor, during the renovations these were blocked. There are now four doors in this room, two are false with cupboards behind, and were added to make the room symmetrical and the other doors lead into the entrance hall and butlers pantry respectively. The dining room has a rather plain interior of pleasing proportions and is decorated in an early neo-classical manner.

A dining room was necessary at Castletown, there had been no specific room for dining in the speaker's time. Indeed in the eighteenth century separate dining rooms

⁷⁴ This is now being rectified by the architects of the Office of Public Works (OPW)

became an essential element of all houses with any pretensions. It was always one of the best and biggest rooms in a house.⁷⁵ The former closets of the old apartment were now used as serving rooms; butlers pantry and scullery, with lead sink and stove. The kitchen was situated over in the west wing, thus by the time the food reached the main house it was usually cold and was reheated in the butler's pantry before being served in the dining room. The journey from dining room to kitchen led past the original strong room with bars on the windows and door, this was where the silver plate was kept under lock and key.

The idea of a main dining room had only recently become fashionable in the mid-eighteenth century. The idea had originally come from France, filtered through England and so to Ireland. Work on the new dining room at Castletown was already in progress by 1764, 'this room that we are making in House will I hope be finished by the beginning of the Summer'.⁷⁶ The dining room it would appear was finished by 1767, Lady Louisa wrote,

The Duke of Leinster and my Sister dined here the other day, it was the first time that he had dined here since our new dining room was made, which he had the making of, I may say, for it was him that persuaded Mr Conolly to do it, he liked it vastly.⁷⁷

Lady Sarah also approved, '... [Sarah] likes better dining in our great dining room, which she likes very much'.⁷⁸ The dining room is painted, not fitted with either

⁷⁵ Girouard, Mark *Life in the English country house* p203.

⁷⁶ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 17 Sept. 1764 (Castletown House letters).

⁷⁷ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 5 May 1767 (Castletown House letters).

⁷⁸ Lady Louisa to the duchess of Leinster, 31 Apr. 1775 [sic] (NLI, The Fitzgerald Correspondence, Ms 612, p57n).

panelling or with silk nor would any dining room have been in the period, for wood and silk would take on the smell of the food. Therefore, after a while, the room would become quite stale and smelly. Today the room has been restored to the colours that Lady Louisa used when the room was constructed, with green walls and a plain white plastered ceiling. The dining room was furnished with two heavy giltwood tables which stood either side of the fireplace and were designed by Chambers. There was a hunt table and a set of twelve dining chairs, a similar set of chairs with the same vine leaf motif were at Carton House. Also in the room was a set of three gilded pier glasses, they have unusual rope frames which are decorated with grape vines suspended from carved wooden bows. These mirrors are by Richard Cranfield.⁷⁹



Fig. 24 The dining room in 1965 and a Cranfield mirror from the dining room.

⁷⁹ Richard Cranfield (1713-1809), Dublin carver and gilder.

One of these three mirrors is cracked, this was as a result of an incident which took place in the eighteenth century. Tom Conolly was out for a day of hunting and he met a stranger who presented him with a challenge which the stranger duly won. As part of the wager, the stranger was wined and dined at Castletown that evening. After dinner, the two gentlemen began to play cards, Tom suspected the stranger was cheating and in order to check that no extra cards were being slipped into the stranger's hand, Tom dropped his napkin under the table and looked under. The stranger had made himself quite comfortable and had kicked off one of his boots to reveal a cloven hoof instead of a foot. Tom grew gravely suspicious and the parish priest was sent for, the parson being away. The priest immediately recognised the stranger for who he was, the devil himself and asked him to leave. The devil refused to do so and so the priest knelt down and began to pray. The devil got up from his seat at the table and walked over to the centre mirror where the priest hurled his prayer book at the devil cracking the mirror as it still is today. The devil then walked over to the fireplace where he disappeared down through the hearthstone in a puff of smoke, the stone in the hearth immediately cracked. It still remains cracked even though the stone has been replaced twice since then.⁸⁰

The dining room while in use in 1767 was not completely finished until the following year, for in 1768, 'There are also Gilders in the House, just come to new gild the frames of our pictures in the Dining Room, all this finishing work is very entertaining, I am as busy as a Bee, and that you know is mighty pleasant'.⁸¹ This letter must surely refer to Cranfield.

⁸⁰ Castletown House guided tour 1997.

⁸¹ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 25 May 1768 (Castletown House letters).



Fig. 25 The enfilade of rooms as seen from the brown study.

The decoration of the state rooms which run the length of the back of the central block of the house for the most part dates to the 1760s. They begin with the brown study (above page) which still has its original panelling. It is in the state rooms that Lady Louisa's initial decorative ideas can be seen. The enfilade of rooms at the back of the house were plainly decorated with simply coved ceilings and wood panelled walls when Louisa arrived. The doors in these rooms in many cases had not yet been put in place, Lady Anne Conolly had written earlier, 'It [Castletown] is so very unfinished without doors.'⁸²

As the work got underway, living at Castletown became more and more difficult so that Tom and Lady Louisa were forced to move to another property, Leixlip Castle

⁸² Hussey, 'Castletown House' p172.

just four miles away, while the work was in progress. While Louisa liked Leixlip it was not the same,

... this place is mighty pretty as you know; and we have settled ourselves very comfortably in it, till May next at which time I hope to go to Castletown, but I don't feel at home here yet. You can have no notion how much the house at Castletown is improved by the alterations we have made⁸³

By December, 'I am now settled here'.⁸⁴ In March, Lady Louisa stated that she had 'been at Castletown every morning where everything is going on so well that we shall get into it in May.'⁸⁵ However she was still at Leixlip in early May when she wrote that she hoped 'in a few days after to get to Castletown you have no notion how pretty it looks now, I am quite like a child about getting there, I am so impatient'.⁸⁶ It is no surprise that another residence was required for the account books of the 1760s are full of references to the work taking place; Mr Ford the plasterer; Mr Cranfield the carver and gilder; Cooper Walker the cabinet maker; William Heaton the mason; Mr Carncross the painter; Mr Bowers the carpenter.⁸⁷ It must also be remembered that the ground floor windows were being lowered by some twenty one inches, more evidence of Vierpyl's work at Castletown. His skill as a mason is apparent, for this alteration can only be detected by the most minute examination of the stonework. The glazing in the house was also changed from four panes across with heavy bars to the more common three panes with delicate glazing. The four pane arrangement is

⁸³ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 6 Dec. 1765 (Castletown House letters).

⁸⁴ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 11 Dec. 1765 (Castletown House letters).

⁸⁵ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 16 Mar. 1766 (Castletown House letters).

⁸⁶ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 9 May 1766, (Castletown House letters).

⁸⁷ Account books of Tom and Lady Louisa Conolly 1766-1784, (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 6963-6)

still visible on the basement level which was not changed. With all this work going on and so many different tradesmen in the house, living at Castletown would have been almost impossible.

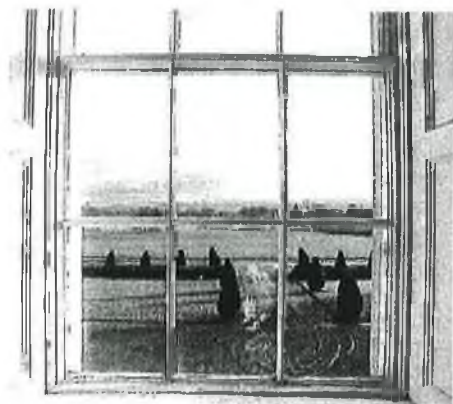


Fig. 26 View through one of the 1760s three paned windows.

The brown study today is much as it was when the speaker was alive. In the 1760s, Lady Louisa introduced new window sashes and architraves. She also added a chimney piece with a carved wood surround and shelf.⁸⁸ The wood panelling in this room is original to the 1720s, as are the tall narrow oak doors. The doorway from the brown study to the red drawing room illustrates the difference between the old and the new doors best, on one side a tall, narrow and rather coarse, oak door and on the other a slightly shorter, finer mahogany door. Speaker Conolly had used this panelled corner room as his office at Castletown. However, as he resided at the Capel Street house while the parliament was in session and as he could not have lived at Castletown for very long anyway, it would appear unlikely that the speaker would have conducted much of his business from here. It was later converted into a breakfast parlour by Lady Louisa and the panelling was painted blue. Many houses of the period had a breakfast room or parlour which were used not only for breakfast but

also as a morning sitting room. The blue paint from Lady Louisa's time has since been removed though traces of it remain above the mantel where the layers of paint from over two hundred years can be seen.⁸⁹ Lady Louisa had a small desk inserted into the west wall in this room which is still there, correspondence was one of her favourite occupations and she would write to her four sisters and two brothers on a regular basis.



Fig. 27 The doorways in the brown study, note the original panelling and the difference between the 1720s and 1760s doors (right).

⁸⁸ Griffin report iii.

⁸⁹ During the 1960s the house was in a very bad state of repair so that the Conolly-Carew family, then the occupiers, were only able to live on this ground floor level and so used the brown study as their kitchen then painted white.

In terms of much of their decoration the dining room and the red and green drawing rooms can be taken together. During the years 1764-8 these three rooms were remodelled, mahogany doors, carved architraves, overdoors and doorcases were put in place. There were new skirting boards, dados, chair rails, cornices, friezes, shutters and window sashes.⁹⁰ This work however was rather protracted due to a lack of finance and also in part to what Lady Louisa referred to as the slowness of the ‘Paddy workmen’.⁹¹ In 1765 she wrote;

... [I] have been very busy about a Plan for some rooms we are going to furnish, you can easily conceive what pleasant work that is, and how much of my time is taken up, I own I am wild about them⁹²

In the dining room and the two drawing rooms, compartmentalised plaster ceilings were installed, they are to the designs of William Chambers, that in the dining room coming directly from Inigo Jones.⁹³ It has been recently suggested that the author of these ceilings was Isaac Ware,⁹⁴ however if the evidence is considered, Chambers seems more likely. While Lady Louisa was in the planning stages at Castletown, she consulted, as any young woman would in need of advice, her older brother, the third duke of Richmond. At the time the duke was remodelling his own home at Goodwood House in Sussex in England and his architect was William Chambers. Chambers also designed the handsome stable block there. Earlier in May 1759 Lady Louisa wrote, ‘Mr Conolly....says they were to send the rest of it [plans] afterwards,

⁹⁰ Griffin report iii.

⁹¹ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 10 Oct. 1766 (Castletown House letters).

⁹² Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 12 May 1765 (Castletown House letters); this letter refers to the dining room and the two drawing rooms.

⁹³ Inigo Jones (1573-1652) English architect who imported the classical style.

or else Mr Chambers, the architect, had explained it to Mr Verpaille [Vierpyl].⁹⁵ Tom Conolly was friendly with the Earl of Charlemont⁹⁶ who had encountered Chambers whilst in Italy and Charlemont had commissioned some designs from him, most famously for the casino building at Marino in Dublin. Chambers was an architect who published many of his designs so they would have been available to all. The attribution of Ware has been made on the basis, that the ceiling in the dining room at Castletown is identical to that in the senate ante chamber at Leinster House in Dublin but it is also similar to one by Inigo Jones in the Queen's House at Greenwich in England.⁹⁷

Similarly the ceilings in the two drawing rooms at Castletown have also been attributed to Isaac Ware. The red drawing room ceiling is similar to that used for the supper room at Leinster house. All three rooms have 1760s chimney pieces, all are of marble and are believed to have come from or via England, and may also be to the designs of Chambers. In May 1759 Lady Louisa wrote to Emily, 'I am vastly glad you like our chimney pieces'.⁹⁸ However this letter might refer to fireplaces already in the house or indeed plans for same as Louisa later wrote in 1768, 'Our chimney pieces are come over, therefore we shall soon furnish our House, which will be a great diversion to me.'⁹⁹ The chimney pieces were very fine, made of white carrara marble.

The decoration of the two drawing rooms are perhaps Lady Louisa's most significant achievement. The early eighteenth century wainscoting is entirely

⁹⁴ Griffin report iii.

⁹⁵ Lady Louisa to the Countess of Kildare, 28 July 1759, Leinster Letters iii p23.

⁹⁶ James Caulfield (1728-99) fourth viscount Charlemont.

⁹⁷ Caffrey, Paul *Castletown guidebook* (Dublin, 1990) p10.

⁹⁸ Lady Louisa to the Countess of Kildare, 28 May 1759, Leinster Letters iii p20.

obscured in both. The remains of the oak panelling was used as a ground on to which the new silk hangings were stretched. The woodwork for these rooms was supplied by Richard Cranfield in 1768.¹⁰⁰ Both drawing rooms have three windows, on the two piers between these windows are handsome gilt glasses. These were made by Thomas Jackson of Capel Street, Dublin.¹⁰¹ Under the pier glasses in both rooms were pier tables, designed by William Chambers.¹⁰² The household accounts in 1768 are full of records of payments made to Dublin upholsterers whose work no doubt included the gilt and mahogany chairs which populated these two rooms.



Fig. 28 The red drawing room.

⁹⁹ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 14 Feb. 1768 (Castletown House letters).

¹⁰⁰ 'Paid Mr Cranfield for Carving and Gilding, Drawing rooms, Dining room, etc. £223 1s 5d' 28 Sept. 1768, in Tom Conolly's account book 1767-70 (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3964, p35).

¹⁰¹ 'Paid £261 1s 8d, Oct. 1768' in Tom Conolly's account book 1767-70 (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3964, p40).

¹⁰² These were sold when the house was sold by the Conolly-Carew family in the 1960s but recently replica tables have been made and will soon be refitted.

The red drawing room was Lady Louisa's drawing room where she entertained the ladies while the men remained after dinner in the dining room to drink, to talk and to smoke.¹⁰³ Lady Louisa also used the room for afternoon tea which seems to have become an established custom by the late eighteenth century. In the red drawing room the ladies would pass an hour or so, taking tea or dessert, playing cards or listening to music. Playing cards was one of Lady Louisa's favourite occupations. Tom however did not always approve, 'his crossness to Louisa appears only in preventing her gaming... Cards is the amusement of older age.'¹⁰⁴ The dining room and drawing room were always separated in such houses by one or more rooms to keep the noise of the men from the ladies. It is a wholly neo-classical room which is typical of Chambers' early work. In this room is an example of a octagonal compartmentalised ceiling from the designs of Chambers and the fireplace was of his design as well. The fireplace in this room was moved from the west wall to the south wall. Today this room is hung with an 1820s red silk but originally there was a four coloured damask silk hanging on the walls, the pre-dominant colour however, must have been red as this room has always been known as the red drawing room.¹⁰⁵ Lady Shelburne¹⁰⁶ recorded in her journal seeing a four coloured damask predominantly red in this room.¹⁰⁷ The silk was hung over the old wood panelling with a thin layer of backing between the two, on to which the silk was hand stitched. The room was furnished with Chinese Chippendale style furniture which was made for Lady Louisa in Dublin in the 1760s, each chair is said to have cost her a guinea and a half, quite

¹⁰³ The idea of men and women becoming separate after dinner came in the late seventeenth century, it was then that the idea of drinking tea and coffee became very fashionable and it was normally served after dinner and supper; usually it was brewed by the hostess, so that the ladies retired to brew after dinner and were joined later by the men, in Girouard, *Life in the English country house* pp204-5

¹⁰⁴ Lady Caroline Fox to the Countess of Kildare, 8 Aug. 1762, Leinster letters i, p388.

¹⁰⁵ Castletown House guided tour 1997.

¹⁰⁶ Lady Sophia Carteret (d. 1771) m. Lord Shelburne in 1765.

extravagant at the time, Lady Louisa thought, but still went ahead and bought them for the room.¹⁰⁸ There was also a fine mahogany bureau bookcase which has a curling broken pedimented top and handsome fitted interior. The interior drawers and pigeon holes in the desk are lettered so that Louisa could file her documents and papers accordingly, it really just give an idea just what an organised young woman she was;

I can't find it in my Heart to burn your letter.... I shall deposit it in my Safe Drawer, what I call my Safe Drawer is one within a cabinet where I put all my letters tied up in Papers.¹⁰⁹



Fig. 29 Lady Louisa's desk.

In the green drawing room the earlier carved architraves were adapted and the doors, excepting that which leads into the entrance hall, have 1760s carved reveals

¹⁰⁷ Caffrey *Castletown Guidebook* p13.

¹⁰⁸ Castletown House guided tour 1997.

¹⁰⁹ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 26 Feb. 1766 (Castletown House letters).

and mouldings. The door to the hall has early architraves but a 1760s pediment.¹¹⁰ The earlier plan shows that the fireplace was originally on the opposite wall. When the room was restored in 1989, the remains of the original 1720s wood panelling came to light underneath. It was of very fine oak. From the evidence on the panelling it would appear that this room was originally decorated with pilasters. An account written in 1769 described the room as being hung with a pale green damask. An entry in Tom Conolly's account book noted payment for a green damask in 1767, 'Paid Bill for the Green Damask, £237 16s 6d.'¹¹¹ The choice of a green silk may have been influenced by a similar room which Lady Louisa had seen years earlier at Lady Anne Conolly's home at Stretton Hall. In a letter to Emily she speaks highly of '... a green damask drawing-room'.¹¹²



Fig. 30 The green drawing room.

¹¹⁰ Griffin report iii.

¹¹¹ Tom Conolly's account book 1767-70 (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3964, p2).

¹¹² Lady Louisa to the countess of Kildare, Mar. 1759, Leinster Letters iii p2.

As already mentioned, this room was once the saloon and the social position of the family required that the room retain some of its early eighteenth century formality, Lady Louisa was obliged to receive visits from society ladies. Lady Louisa, however, avoided such social etiquette whenever possible and as a result she rarely returned visits or indeed even went to the Conolly town house, 'I sometimes fear that I am an unsociable sort of animal, I do enjoy so prodigiously the living alone.'¹¹³ Lady Louisa engaged in public affairs only when her position demanded. Lady Sarah wrote;

Lady Louisa does not seek enlarging her acquaintance, for she has so many more than she can manage.....that she could not do it all but for the footing her peculiar character has established.....I believe it is because she aims at nothing, that so great an allowance is given her; for do you know she scarcely visits anybody.....dropping in at odd times but she now and then goes to town to see the world..... and tells the world it would be so good-natured of then to show forgiveness by coming and dining with her..... that they come; they see that she has ten thousand occupations and enjoys her home, so they go away pleased with their reception, and bid her never think of a formal visit.'¹¹⁴

Lady Louisa did not always approve of the current ladies fashions either. Dress fashions were very elaborate in the eighteenth century and she wrote that she always wore powder when dressed up, however the powdering of wig and hair annoyed her;

the most woeful of inventions, it dirties every chair you sit in...I have been obliged to hunt out a clean chair for myself, those in common use being such beasts...all my poor chairs are greazed with them. It is such a dirty fashion. I cannot bear it at any rate at

¹¹³ Lady Louisa to the duchess of Leinster, 8 Jan. 1775, (NLI, The Fitzgerald Correspondence, Ms 612 p57b).

¹¹⁴ Undated letter written by Lady Sarah to her friend, Lady Susan O'Brien, (Castletown House letters).

dinner, if I sit in the neighbourhood...my plate is full of powder.¹¹⁵



Fig. 31 The doorway from the green drawing room to the entrance hall.

As in the red drawing room the details in the green drawing room correspond to the published designs of Chambers. The ceiling, fireplace, pier glasses and pier tables were designed by Chambers. In terms of design they are all related by the Greek key motif evident on each. Chambers may also have supplied details for the chair rail and skirting boards in addition to the detailing for the mahogany doors and overdoors. The green damask was bordered with a carved timber and gilt fillet. This room has recently been rehung with a damask identical in colour to fragments which were

¹¹⁵ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 4 Sept. 1777, (Castletown House letters).

found attached to some of the woodwork in the room and which date to Lady Louisa's time, these were found during recent restoration work.



Fig. 32 The print room.

The print room at Castletown is one of the most remarkable rooms in the house. This room was once part of the earlier apartment, it formed the ante chamber with the bedroom beside it. This bedroom apartment was abandoned during Louisa's time when she opted to refit the south facing rooms on the first floor of the house, they were more comfortable and the sun shone through the window in the morning.

By 1768 the redecoration of the ground floor rooms and the work in the staircase hall had been completed and it was in this year that work on the print room started. The abandonment of the former apartment was one of the most tangible pieces of evidence, of the change apparent in the re-altering. Here in the old ante-room the print room began. New skills in the art of printing after the middle of the eighteenth century led to a wider availability of high quality prints which were engraved after well known works of art. Prints were often the only means that artists had of publicising their work and through this they reached a wider audience. This new availability of prints led ultimately to the advent of the print room. It was a ladies occupation, something for a rainy day, a pastime for cultivated house-owners which came to be imitated by professional decorators. In the eighteenth century it was the fashion for ladies to ornament rooms and screens with attractive prints which were pasted onto the chosen surface and surrounded with engraved borders. The prints were arranged and stuck either directly onto the wall or onto paper and then onto the wall.

The fashion for such rooms began in the 1750s and the idea has been attributed to Lord Cardigan.¹¹⁶ In 1746 Lady Cardigan made payments to a paper hanger for pasting up 'Indian' pictures with borders in her dining room. There is no way of knowing however whether Lord Cardigan actually devised the printed border or was simply the first to employ it.¹¹⁷ The print room idea reached its peak in the early nineteenth century. It would appear that the idea was contained within Britain and Ireland, the print room at Castletown is the earliest intact example in Ireland. This,

¹¹⁶ George Brudenell (1712-1790), fourth earl of Cardigan.

¹¹⁷ Calloway, Stephen 'Engraving Schemes' in *Country Life* 18 Apr. 1991, pp102-5.

however is not that surprising, after all the prints are only made of paper and are pasted on to a paper background, thus preservation is not easy. The idea of the print room perhaps derived from the French mania for decoupage,¹¹⁸ the general name given to a variety of decorative pastimes which occupied the leisure and delicately wrought scissors of gentlewomen across Europe in the early eighteenth century.



Fig. 33 The print room in 1965.

Lady Louisa is responsible for the Castletown print room, no one else was consulted for its decoration, from choosing the prints to their arrangement on the walls. There had been a print room at Carton House and perhaps this is where Louisa got the idea, she may have even helped in its decoration while she was still living at Carton. That period at Carton 1751-58 would coincide with the period when the

¹¹⁸ An ornamental technique using paper cut-outs to create scenes and designs on furniture, walls,

room and drawing rooms. The original carved architraves were cut down, 1760s mahogany doors and overdoors were fitted. Like the two drawing rooms the panelled reveals on the doors were decorated with carved mouldings.¹²⁵ Originally there was a door to the east corridor and this was converted into a jib door in 1768, on the east corridor side the original door can still be seen. The household accounts note that alterations were made to doors, dados, architraves and woodwork for the print room which were carried out by William Heaton in 1768.¹²⁶ Alterations in this room may have involved removing panelling from the walls so as to create a smooth surface onto which the prints could be pasted. The print room still has its original coved and moulded ceiling and cornice. The ceiling in this room suggests the form of ceiling that once existed in the preceding rooms.

The prints at Castletown were not pasted directly on to the wall but were first stuck onto sheets of cream wallpaper (it has since been repainted) and then the sheet as a whole was pasted onto the wall. Lady Louisa herself is responsible for the first stage, that of pasting prints and the borders onto the wallpaper. The print room has a balanced and pleasing layout and it is entirely representative of Lady Louisa's own artistic preferences.

In 1769 Louisa wrote to Sarah to request her to buy some prints,

at any time you happen to go into a print shop, I would be obliged to you if you will

¹²⁴ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 23 Sept. 1763 (Castletown House letters).

¹²⁵ Griffin report iii.

¹²⁶ Hunt, print room thesis p6.

buy me five or six large prints, there are some by Teniers¹²⁷ engraved by Le Bas which I am told are larger than the common size. If you meet with any pray send me a few.¹²⁸

This letter suggests that the print room was as yet unfinished but would indicate that she had at least a plan of some sort. A small hand-drawn plan exists at Castletown for a print room, it however, bears no relation to the print room at Castletown but it may be an earlier unexecuted plan. While it is both undated and unsigned and thus not a reliable source, if it is by Lady Louisa it shows that she quite obviously planned for this room. Lady Shelburne (above page 57) saw the 'print room on the palest paper I ever saw and the prettiest of its kind' in 1769.¹²⁹ This letter would suggest that the room was then finished.

The prints themselves came from various sources, some were bound together and bought on the grand tour, others were bought individually by the travellers and there were print shops which provided a domestic market, though London provided a greater choice of prints and a greater number of stockists than Dublin. There were many print sellers in eighteenth century London, Louisa usually made a trip to England each year and certainly would have gone to London, if not she would commission her sister, Sarah. Louisa's personal account book for the years 1766-75 show a number of entries relating to the payment of her account at Mrs Regniers.¹³⁰ In 1765 Louisa made a trip to France with Sarah and may have bought some prints

¹²⁷ David Teniers (1638-85) Flemish painter.

¹²⁸ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 10 Jan. 1769 (Castletown House letters).

¹²⁹ Moore, Christopher 'Lady Louisa Conolly: mistress of Castletown 1759-1821' in *New Perspectives; studies in art history in honour of Anne Crookshank* (Dublin, 1987) p131.

¹³⁰ Lady Louisa's personal account book, (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3966).

there, perhaps those after Boucher, Roberts and Greuze,¹³¹ and Sarah was in Paris again in 1767.

Each print had a panel at the bottom of it and this inscribed panel gave the name of the original artist and the engraver, the title of the print and name of the seller or publisher. However, in all of the Castletown prints, except two, these panels have been cut off. This means that it is relatively impossible to positively identify the prints and thus make an attribution or indeed to discover where Lady Louisa had purchased her prints. The panels were removed because in several cases the prints were cut down in order to fit the scheme on the walls.

The prints fill the space from just above the chair rail to just under the cornice and many were cut down to fit Lady Louisa's layout. The disposition of the prints is perhaps its most charming aspect. Lady Louisa spent a great deal of time choosing her prints and planning their distribution. On the east, west and south walls the prints are arranged in three blocks. The prints are surrounded by lion masks, floral swags and hunting motifs. The borders and swags of foliage and flowers were printed in sheet form along with the borders and frames. In an interesting effect Louisa has made the prints appear as if they are hanging on the walls rather than simply stuck up by 'hanging' them up with ribbons, chains and ropes. In total there are one hundred and three prints in the room.¹³²

¹³¹ Francois Boucher, (footnote 68); Hubert Roberts (1733-1808) French painter; Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) French genre painter.

¹³² Castletown House guided tour 1997.



Fig. 34 Print of Lady Sarah Bunbury from the print room.

Print rooms in the eighteenth century reflected the paintings that a family would have bought or acquired had they been able to do so. While this is the case at Castletown, Lady Louisa would also include prints which are of a more personal nature. Over the fireplace is a print of her favourite actor 'David Garrick between the muses of tragedy and comedy' after Joshua Reynolds. Opposite this print is Garrick again in a print with Mrs Cibber, a popular actress of the day, which is after Zoffany.¹³³ On the south wall in the centre, is the largest print in the room is 'Lady Sarah Bunbury sacrificing to the graces', engraved by Edward Fisher from the original

¹³³ Johann Zoffany (1733-1810), German portrait painter.

by Reynolds, 'Paid for Lady Sarah Bunbury's print £1 1s.'¹³⁴ On the opposite wall to Sarah, there is, ironically a print of 'The children of Charles I', in which Lady Louisa's great grandfather Charles II can be seen as a boy. This print was after Van Dyck.¹³⁵ There is a large variety of subjects in the prints from moral themes to landscapes after Claude Lorraine,¹³⁶ scenes of leisure and entertainment but none engraved after history paintings, quite surprising as the eighteenth century represented the golden age in this genre. Lady Louisa used her print room as an informal sitting room where she entertained her sisters and close friends.

Lady Louisa did much of her decorative work in the closet rooms which were placed beyond bedrooms and ante-rooms and were essential for the privacy of those to whom the rooms belonged. There are eighteen of these at Castletown and Lady Louisa made great use of them throughout her life as sitting rooms, dressing rooms and wash rooms (with hot water stoves). In these rooms Lady Louisa indulged her interest in decorating, their small size allowed her to try new schemes. These included the use of white satin, painted cut out shapes and of India or Chinese paper, 'busy papering some closets'.¹³⁷ The small size of these rooms was their principal attraction, Lady Louisa constantly complained of the cold and these rooms were easy to keep warm. It was in these rooms that she kept her personal belongings and working materials.

Eight windows light the long gallery which is situated on the first floor at the back of the house. It is a large room measuring some eighty feet by twenty feet

¹³⁴ Lady Louisa's personal account book, 4 Dec. 1766 (TCD, Conolly papers, Ms 3966, p8).

¹³⁵ Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) Flemish painter, in England 1620.

approximately. The long gallery is part of the original design plan of Castletown House. When the house was built, it had been Speaker Conolly's intention to use this room, as the name suggests as a picture gallery so that as the Conollys would come and go at Castletown, so their portraits would remain for posterity. The room and its use as a picture gallery was described by John Loveday when he visited the house in 1732,

as ye long gallery proportionately wide. Here is a length of ye Duke of Wharton, another ye Duke of Grafton, Lord Lieutenant and his duchess, but a remarkably good length painting of Lord Chancellor West in his robes. There are a large number of prints here and some antique seals taken of in wax and put into glass picture cases. No tapestry but what was made in Dublin; ye figures are small ye colours lively.¹³⁸

It is obvious from this quote that the room was being used as a picture gallery. The gallery was originally designed by Edward Lovett Pearce, all that remains of his decoration of this room is the ceiling, cornice and frieze. The ceiling has three compartments, divided by stuccowork similar to that in the entrance hall. On the walls there had been plaster panelling like that in the entrance hall, it was removed to prepare for the new decoration in 1774-6. The mouldings which remain in the long gallery have the same traditional classic style of the great hall.

The work on the gallery was already underway by 1759, 'We have sent by Lord Kildare the designs for finishing the gallery.'¹³⁹ Lady Louisa had admired a long

¹³⁶ Claude Lorraine (1600-82) French landscape painter.

¹³⁷ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 17 Sept. 1760, (Castletown House letters).

¹³⁸ Keller, Ann Margaret 'The long gallery of Castletown House' in *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society* xxii (Dublin, 1979) pp1-53, p1.

gallery she saw at Wentworth Castle, home of her husband's relations, 'The house is very fine especially that Long Gallery you have heard so much of its really the finest room that can be'.¹⁴⁰ By December of the following year she wrote, 'The gallery will be done in a fortnight'.¹⁴¹

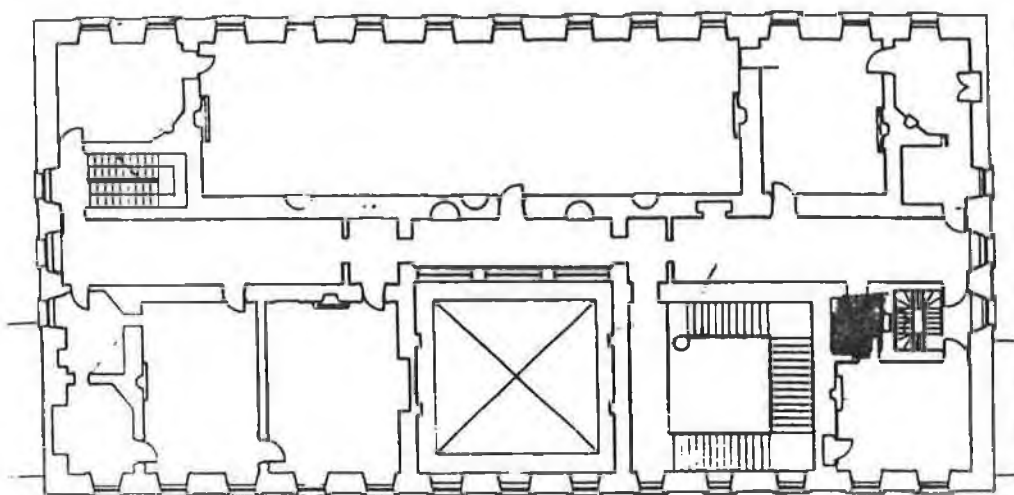


Fig. 35 Recent plan of the first floor.

Like the ground floor rooms, the long gallery underwent some alterations in the 1760s and this must be what Louisa is referring to in her earlier letters. There were mahogany doors and overdoors fitted, and carved and gilded pelmets inserted over the windows, these were designed by Chambers. In the 1760s window sashes, shutters, architraves, a flat skirting board which was grained to make it look like mahogany, a panelled dado and a chair rail were installed.¹⁴² Two white marble chimney pieces with small painted panels were also inserted. The mantels stand on two ionic columns and they were flanked by bookcases. Above them are gilt framed portraits,

¹³⁹ Lady Louisa to Countess of Kildare, 28 May 1759, *Leinster Letters* iii, p20.

¹⁴⁰ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 19 Aug. 1759 (*Castletown House letters*).

¹⁴¹ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 15 Dec. 1760 (*Castletown House letters*).

¹⁴² Griffin report iv; the first floor.

at the east end Tom Conolly by Anton Raphael Mengs¹⁴³ painted in Rome in 1758 while he was on the grand tour and at the west end, Lady Louisa Conolly by Sir Joshua Reynolds, commissioned to match the Mengs for the gallery. Unfortunately both paintings in the gallery today are copies of the originals.¹⁴⁴

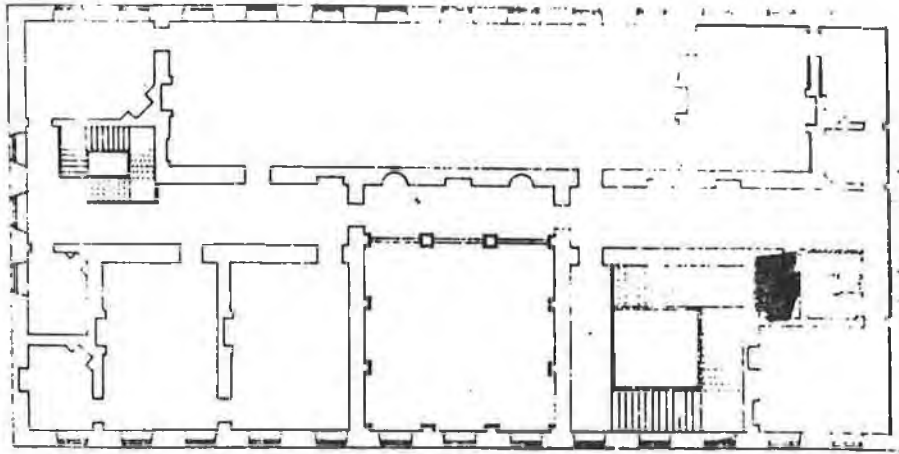


Fig. 36 Plan of the first floor from 1760 showing the original arrangement of the rooms.

There were originally six doors in this room, two on the south wall which gave access to the east and west corridors, there was a door at either end of the room on the window side of the fireplaces which led into the blue bedroom and the grey room respectively. The two end doors were balanced by two false doors situated on the other side of the fireplaces. Since 1760 all the doors have been changed. In the refurbishment these doors were removed, the two on the south wall were transformed into two niches, the doors at either end of the room removed but at the west end the one nearest the window made into a jib door. This door led into the grey room and from here the servants brought the family their meals while they were in the gallery. The original doors by the fireplace must have been quite draughty. Around the

¹⁴³ Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-79), German painter and an early exponent of neo-classicism.

¹⁴⁴ Tom Conolly now hangs in the National Gallery in Dublin while Lady Louisa Conolly hangs in the Fogg Museum in Harvard, USA.

original doors were columns which were removed and used to create a bathing house by the river (below page 99). The six doors became only two, the jib door and one leading out to the landing in the entrance hall. This door was in line with the front door and is balanced by a false door on the long gallery side. The blind door in the gallery serves to balance the real one but it also disguises the fact that to accommodate the placing of the entrance from the landing side, the real doorway had to be placed off centre as far as the gallery was concerned. The tall niche between these doors balances the two smaller niches between the mirrors; there are four large rectangular mirrors on this south wall of the gallery. Chambers may have designed these three niches. The idea of a door leading from the gallery to the entrance hall may also have come from him.



Fig. 37 Niche from the long gallery.

Chambers may also have designed the gilded wall brackets which held the portrait busts. The busts and the brackets on the south wall are original, as is the statue of

Diana which stands in the niche between the doorways. The eight busts are of classical dignitaries; L. Verus, Hesiod, Homer, Plato, Cicero, Niobe, Sappho and Caesar. These may have been sculpted by Simon Vierpyl as he was a specialist in copying antique sculpture. Because of the controversy surrounding the removal of classical sculpture from Greece, the seventeenth century statue of Diana was smuggled out of the country in a coffin.

In 1764 Lady Louisa wrote,

My Sister Kildare has set me quite distracted about a picture of you that she says is quite delightfull, done by Reynolds, I am sure I should doat upon it, it sounds the prettiest thing in nature, and when I see it if it answers my expectation, I will go to Goal rather than not have it, but I'll persuade Mr Conolly to buy it for his Gallery, I mean a copy for I hear Mr Bunbury intends to have this. In short I am wild about pictures of you and my sister Kildare, I don't think I shall ever be satisfied without dozens of them.¹⁴⁵

This quote would imply that even as late as 1764 the gallery was still being used as a picture gallery. By 1765 the room was still not finished and the Conollys were in financial difficulty after decorating the hall, having the staircase built and the alterations to the bedroom suite on the first floor. Thus the long gallery would have to wait until money was available.

¹⁴⁵ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 1764 (date missing), (Castletown House letters); it is a print of this portrait which hangs in the print room.



Fig. 38 Detail of the doors in the long gallery.

The work on the long gallery began again in earnest in the 1770s. Lady Louisa had been in England early in 1773 and visited her brother's home at Goodwood, an artist named Reily was working on the library there at the time, 'the library is doing, and to my taste is one of the prettiest rooms I ever saw; if Mr Conolly approves, I shall wish mightily to finish our gallery in the same manner.'¹⁴⁶ In May 1774 Lady Louisa wrote,

I am busy as usual but can't enjoy the out of doors work, as I do the Gallery, which is going so well, and I hope will turn out a very comfortable room, tho' not quite in the perfection that I could wish it. The ceiling is heavy, but the excessive sloaness of the Plaisterers work comforts me for not having taken it down, as it must have been ages

¹⁴⁶ Lady Louisa to the duchess of Leinster, 21 Jan. 1773 (NLI, The Fitzgerald correspondence, Ms 611 p32).

before we could have lived in the room, and to say the truth I have a great deal of impatience about having things finished for the Irish workmen try ones patience not a little.¹⁴⁷

By September 1774 the room was ready to be painted and she wrote to her brother, the duke,

If you can spare Mr Reilly now, we are quite ready for him as soon as is convenient to you. The Duke of Leinster is not ready for him therefore it will only be our own work, which will not keep him long, and whatever agreement you make for us, we shall like. I believe he had better bring any nice colour that he may want with him as I don't know whether they have the choice of all colours here. The Painter and Gilder I shall not want, as I [am] employing a person here, that I fancy will do it well enough.¹⁴⁸

In October 1774, Lady Louisa wrote, 'I have stayed here, chiefly diverting myself with doing the gallery, and doing the civil thing in having women here which has, been but tiresome, but however is over.'¹⁴⁹ The duke of Richmond, however, was not forthcoming with fulfilling his promise to send Reily over, for in November Louisa wrote to Sarah,

I wish my brother would send me Mr Reily for I am impatient to get our room finished; Six weeks or two months are as long as I should want him. what has been done is in the style you intended it, for I have painted the ceiling in scarlet grey and white and

¹⁴⁷Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 26 May 1774 (Castletown House letters).

¹⁴⁸Lady Louisa to the duke of Richmond, 11 Sept. 1774 (Castletown House letters).

¹⁴⁹Lady Louisa to duchess of Leinster, 9 Oct. 1774 (NLI, The Fitzgerald correspondence, Ms 611, p48).

gold and it really looks much better than I expected. If I am not to go to England pray send me Mr Riely directly je petille d`impatinece; I wrote to my brother some time ago, about him but thinking that we should go to England I suppose made him think no more about it.¹⁵⁰

In January 1775, Riely still had not started painting the gallery, 'Our gallery is finished - all but Mr Riely's part. I shall bring him when I return from England. I think it is really pretty. But the French glasses are very bad and imperfect, however they look handsome up.'¹⁵¹ 'I think that ours [glasses] suffered by lying so long upon their sides, the silver run a little at the edges.'¹⁵² It would appear thus that the mirrors were stored while the room was being painted which added to their bad quality.



Fig. 39 The long gallery.

¹⁵⁰ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 2 Nov. 1774 (Castletown House letters).

¹⁵¹ Lady Louisa to duchess of Leinster, 8 Jan. 1775 (NLI, The Fitzgerald correspondence, Ms 612, p57b).

¹⁵² Lady Louisa to duchess of Leinster, 9 Oct. 1775 (NLI, The Fitzgerald correspondence, Ms 612, p67ee).

The long gallery is decorated in the neo-classical style which was popular in the 1770s, the so-called pompeian manner. The style was based on a revival of antique art which was stimulated by the discovery and excavation of the ruins at Pompeii and Herulaneum. Their influence was widespread especially after 1749 and was due mostly to the grand tour.¹⁵³ Tom Conolly had visited Italy in 1758 and may have bought published copies of the designs from the ruins. The 1720s ceiling was painted in pompeian colours to match the painted walls. The room was used as a large living room, it was very informal and the family spent most of their time in this room during the winter months.

The room was decorated with paintings in 1775-6 and the work was carried out by Charles Reuben Reilly (c.1752-1798) and Thomas Ryder (1746-1810). These two artists have been identified in recent years as being the masters of the long gallery although in Lady Louisa's letters she only mentions 'Riley' but some art historians have questioned this and believe that two artists carried out the work.¹⁵⁴ Lady Louisa, for some unknown reason, always confused the two artists Reilly and Ryder. Riley was the best known of the two artists, described as 'a little delicate deformed man'.¹⁵⁵ The fact that he was crippled, as is evidenced by one of Lady Louisa's letters, limited some of his painting abilities. In March 1776,

that little Ryley can't work upon his back and upon his belly, as Mr Dean did at Carton many years ago for her Ladyship; and therefore, it will be necessary to have some sort of slight mouldings that the painting may be done on canvas, and so posted

¹⁵³ Keller, 'The long gallery' p11.

¹⁵⁴ Keller, 'The long gallery' p45.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p45-6.

up in the different compartments like my brother's. Very slight work will do, but it must be settled in order to go on altogether.¹⁵⁶

Reily's deformity suggests that he could not mount high scaffold. In the library at Goodwood it appears that he worked on panels or very low down on the wall. In the gallery at Castletown there is a great difference in the quality visible in various parts of the room. All the frieze panels at Castletown are executed on canvas and are attached to the wall afterwards and one of these scenes appeared on the wall at Goodwood.¹⁵⁷ It is reasonable to give authorship of these panels and the niches to Riley.¹⁵⁸ Ryder was an engraver by trade and thus would have been familiar with volumes of antiquity and engravings. He is responsible for the major part of the wall decoration. Lady Louisa never mentions there being an assistant in the gallery but it is possible that Ryder worked under Riley. The 'Aurora' lunette is undated and unsigned and does not appear to have been painted by either artist, perhaps it was one of the earliest pieces bought for the room, but obviously after the doors had been installed. The long gallery represents the twin themes of love and festivity and the arrangement of the portraits of Tom and Louisa above each fireplace symbolises that they had the perfect marriage.¹⁵⁹

Much of the decoration in the gallery was based on Raphael's cartoons for the loggia in the Vatican in Rome, there was an enormous book, about five feet in length,

¹⁵⁶ Lady Louisa to William Ogilvie (Emily's second husband), 10 Mar. 1776 (NLI, The Fitzgerald correspondence, Ms 612, p64).

¹⁵⁷ Keller, 'The long gallery' p47.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p48.

¹⁵⁹ Castletown House guided tour 1997.

at Castletown which contained coloured designs from which Riley worked.¹⁶⁰ These were a major source for the decoration for the gallery. Unfortunately Riely's sketches have not survived. Also used were books of engravings which were published after the excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum notably d'Hancarville's *Antiquites Etrusques, Greques, et Romaines* (1766-7) and Montfoucon's *L'antiquite expliquée et representée en figures* (1719).¹⁶¹



Fig. 40 Tom Conolly's portrait from the east end of the long gallery.

In April 1775 Riely arrived,

I have brought Mr Riely over to paint our gallery, it is all finished but to his part, so that we shall now live in it. I do think it looks very comfortable, and the breakfasting there to-morrow I shall like very much. Sally is vastly pleased with the house and place, and admires the view and spot about my cottage.¹⁶²

By June of that year the work was progressing well,

¹⁶⁰ Hussey, 'Castletown House' p186.

¹⁶¹ Keller, 'The long gallery' pp16-8.

¹⁶² Lady Louisa to duchess of Leinster, 31 Apr. 1775 [sic], (NLI, The Fitzgerald correspondence, Ms 612, p57n); Lady Louisa had a little cottage on the banks of the river Liffey which had a view of the house.

He is now painting our gallery in a most beautiful way, Sarah's taste in putting the ornaments together, and mine in picking them out, so that *we* flatter ourselves that it must be charming, as Mr Riley executes them so well.¹⁶³

It would appear that the method used was oil paint onto smooth plaster. Lady Sarah was so pleased with Riely's work, that she recommended him to her sister Emily who was building a house by the sea at Blackrock, County Dublin;

I must advise you not to let little Riley escape you by any means whatsoever, for his taste, his execution, his diligence [and] his price are really a treasure, and will not be met with again. For Mr Conolly and Louisa *se font conscience* to give him so little as £100 a year, and mean to add a little more to it. We reckon that his business in this house will be finished about next August.¹⁶⁴

However, in August, the gallery was still unfinished but Lady Louisa wrote;

Mr Riely goes on swimmingly in the Gallery, but I am doing much more than I intended, that pretty grey, white and gold look that I admired in the ends of the room, did look a little naked by the painted compartment when finished, upon asking Mr Conolly's opinion about it, he meekly told me, he had always thought it would be much prettier to have painting, but thought I knew best. Did you ever hear anything so humble? Upon which Mr Riely has made me some pretty slight sketches that end at the heads of the busts, and are an addition but they make the stucco panels look so very bad that they are going to be knocked off, smack smooth, which I know you will

¹⁶³ Lady Louisa to duchess of Leinster, 25 June 1775, Leinster letters iii p141.

¹⁶⁴ Lady Sarah to duchess of Leinster, 10 Sept. 1775, published in Fitzgerald, Brian (Ed) *Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster 1731-1814* ii (Dublin, 1953), (hereafter cited as *Leinster Letters* ii), p156; letter regarding Emily's new house, Frascati at Blackrock, Co. Dublin.

approve of.¹⁶⁵

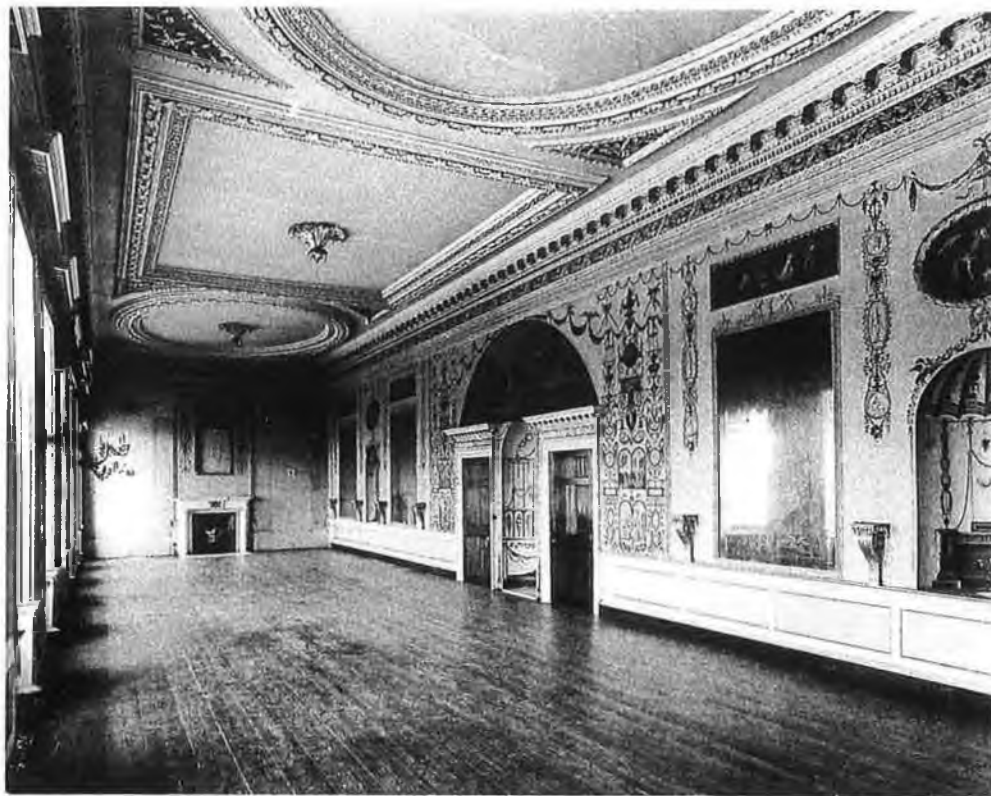


Fig. 41 The long gallery in 1965.

A month later Lady Louisa replied to a letter from Lady Sarah;

You ask about the Gallery, tis very near finished and looks vastly well, and the comfort of the room is beyond description. The complaints Mr Conolly and I both had in different ways has made us enjoy the room still more. He is at present ill with Influenza and making use of the length of the room for a walk and lived in it entirely yesterday.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 17 Aug. 1776 (Castletown House letters).

¹⁶⁶ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, Sept. 1776 (Castletown House letters).

By March 1777 she was glad to report that, 'First of all little Ryley finished three months ago, but is now working for other people.'¹⁶⁷ Thus by the end of 1776 the gallery and Lady Louisa's decoration of Castletown was finished.

Over each of the four mirrors is a frieze panel, painted on canvas and set into a gilded stucco frame, the width of each panel matching that of each mirror. Similarly there are panels over the two portraits again matched in size and painted rounded ovals over the two decorative niches, these however appear to have been painted in situ, that is on the wall. In some areas of the room details have been painted in grisaille to simulate bas relief plasterwork, this was a decorative trick common in neo-classical decoration of the time. It is used in the sphinx motifs which can be seen above the mirrors and above the portraits over the fireplaces. Also the grisaille decoration can be seen in the strips of decoration above the eight portrait busts. The decoration on the walls is linked by foliage, fruit and flower motifs.

The north or window wall is treated differently, the space between the two windows at either end of the room is covered by painting from dado to cornice. Each has three main pictures with subsidiary painting around them and on the lowest part of the two ends are the monograms of Tom's family at his end, the east end and Louisa's at the other. The panel opposite the central niche is also painted but with four main paintings, there are no monograms here. Thus along the window wall there are four blank sections with a painted roundel high up near the cornice on each, there were

¹⁶⁷ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 25 Mar. 1777 (Castletown House letters).

originally bookcases beneath. Thomas Ryan, Carvers was paid for ‘five days carving the bookcases for the Ball Room at 3/9 per day’ on 8 October 1774.¹⁶⁸

The Venetian chandeliers are original to the room. While they were being sent from Venice, the room was painted. However as Lady Louisa wrote, ‘the chandeliers have arrived intact but they are the wrong blue for the room’.¹⁶⁹ It had been her intention that the blue in the chandeliers would match the blue on the wall but as the room was so far ahead in being painted when the chandeliers arrived, she decided to leave it the way it was.

The long gallery was used as a large living or recreation room during Lady Louisa’s time. The idea of a living room was a relatively novel idea in the 1770s. It was certainly *avant garde* in the multiplicity of uses that went on within.

In the gallery where we live ‘tis the most comfortable room you ever saw, and quite warm; supper at one end, the company at the other, and I am writing in one of the piers at a distance from all.¹⁷⁰

‘Our gallery is full, some singing, some playing at Chess, others at cards...’¹⁷¹ The gallery was furnished with a 1790s broadwood piano for guests to entertain on, writing desks, a billiard table, card tables, a set of large mahogany bookcases and a

¹⁶⁸ Castletown House Account book 1768-75, not foliated and unpublished.

¹⁶⁹ Keller, ‘The long gallery’ p4.

¹⁷⁰ Lady Louisa to the duchess of Leinster, 7 Dec. 1775 (NLI, The Fitzgerald correspondence, Ms 612, p57nn).

¹⁷¹ Tom Conolly to the Earl of Buckinghamshire, Jan. 1781, quoted in Keller, ‘The long gallery’ p9.

set of armchairs with the same vine-leaf motif as the dining room chairs. In January 1776 Lady Louisa wrote,

Our gallery was in great vogue, and really is a charming room, for there are such variety of occupations in it, that people cannot be formal in it. Lord Harcourt was writing, some of us played at Whist, others at Billiards, Mrs Gardiner at the harpsichord, others at work, others at chess, others reading, and supper at one end; all this without interruption to the different occupations.¹⁷²

Lady Louisa radically changed Castletown House and brought it forward in its decoration. It was no longer the old fashioned house she had seen in 1758. After almost two decades of work the house was finished and ready for live in. In 1779 a visitor, Miss Sandford, described the goings on at Carton House and there is no reason to doubt that life at Castletown with its new informality was any different.

The house was crowded - a thousand comers and goers. We breakfast between ten and eleven, though it is called half past nine. We have an immense table -chocolate-honey-hot bread-cold bread-brown bread-white bread-green bread-and all coloured breads and cakes. After breakfast Mr Scott, the Duke's Chaplain, reads a few short prayers, and we then go as we like - a back room for reading, a billiard room, a print room, a drawing room, and whole suites of rooms, not forgetting the music room.... We dine at half-past four or five....then go to tea; so to cards about nine; play till supper-time - t'is pretty late by the time we go to bed.... There are all sorts of amusements; the gentlemen are out hunting and shooting all the morning.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Lady Louisa to duchess of Leinster, 5 Jan. 1776 (NLI, The Fitzgerald correspondence, Ms 612, p58).

¹⁷³ Fitzgerald, Brian *Emily, duchess of Leinster 1731-1814* (London, 1949) p166.

Chapter Three

Lady Louisa Conolly (1743-1821);

Mistress of Castletown

Lady Louisa Augusta Lennox was born on the 5 December 1743, the third surviving daughter of Charles, the second duke of Richmond (1701-50). Her mother was Lady Sarah Cadogan (d. 1751), eldest daughter of the first Earl Cadogan.¹⁷⁴ The marriage of Charles and Lady Sarah at The Hague on 4 December 1719, was a bargain to settle a gambling debt between their parents. Louisa's father, then known as the earl of March was not pleased with the match, referring to his young sixteen year old bride as a 'dowdy'. After the ceremony the young earl left with his tutor for the grand tour on the continent and had little or no contact with his young wife during the three years he was away. On his return to London, the earl did not visit his relatively new wife but instead went to the Haymarket Theatre to see the evenings

¹⁷⁴ First Earl Cadogan (1675-1726), succeeded by his brother General Charles Cadogan (d. 1776).

performance and there, was captivated by a young lady in the audience. At the interval he discovered that the beautiful lady in question was his wife, Lady March, the toast of the town.¹⁷⁵



Fig. 42 Charles, the second duke of Richmond and his duchess, Sarah.

Lady Louisa's great grandfather was in fact Charles II the king of England. Her grandfather, Charles, the first duke of Richmond, had been one of the king's thirteen bastard children and one of five sons who received dukedoms.¹⁷⁶ His mother was Louise de Keroualle (1649-1734) later the Duchess of Portsmouth and the best loved of the king's mistresses but she was nevertheless hated in England as being French, catholic and a spy.¹⁷⁷

Lady Louisa's early years were spent at Goodwood House in Sussex with occasional visits to London. At the age of five she spent a few months in France

¹⁷⁵ Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p10.

¹⁷⁶ The other four dukedoms being those of Southampton, Grafton and Northumberland which were given to the sons of Lady Castlemaine and that of St. Albans given to the son of Nell Gwyn.

¹⁷⁷ Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p7.

when her father was appointed to the ambassador's post there. The Lennox children had learned to speak French before they learned English.¹⁷⁸

The duke of Richmond died suddenly in 1750 at the age of forty nine and in August the following year, so too did the Duchess.¹⁷⁹ Their marriage had been one of the most solid at the time and it is perhaps possible that she died of a broken heart after he passed away. With Lady Caroline and Lady Emily already married, Lords Charles and George away at school, the younger children, Ladies Louisa, Sarah and Cecilia were left under the guardianship of the duke of Newcastle, Lord Albemarle, Lord Kildare, Lord Cadogan and Henry Fox.¹⁸⁰

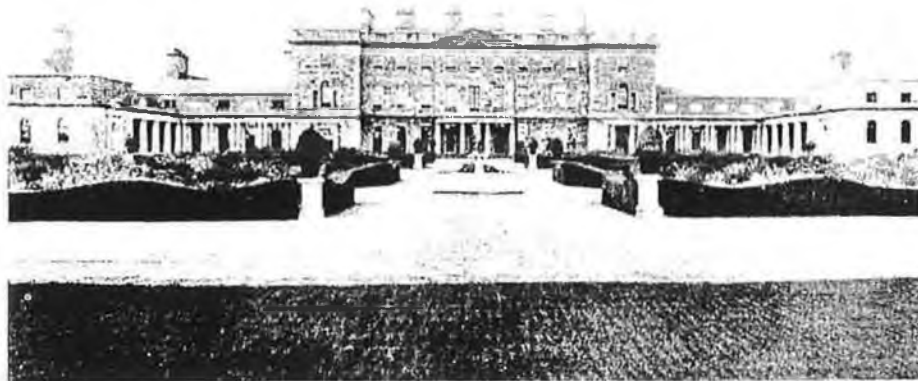


Fig. 43 Carton House, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

In his will, the second duke of Richmond who had forgiven but not forgotten his eldest daughter Caroline's elopement, passed over her in assigning homes and educators for his younger daughters and so the three little girls were entrusted to the

¹⁷⁸ Fitzgerald, *Lady Louisa Conolly* p12.

¹⁷⁹ Tillyard, *Aristocrats* pp80-1.

¹⁸⁰ Lord Kildare and Henry Fox being their brothers-in-law, the duke of Newcastle a friend of their father, Lord Albemarle was married to their fathers sister, Lady Anne Lennox and Lord Cadogan was their great uncle; Fitzgerald, *Lady Louisa Conolly* p13.

care of Lady Emily in the event of the duchess of Richmond's death. Thus in 1751 the girls arrived at Carton House, Maynooth, County Kildare, and Emily became more than a sister to the girls, and took on the role of a second mother.

While Emily dealt with the rearing of the girls, their brother, Charles, the third duke of Richmond assumed his father's mantle and helped in the search for suitable husbands for his sisters but reserved the right of veto over the candidates.¹⁸¹ He dealt with the marriage settlements, annuities and wills and in times of crisis he could provide a safe haven and money as he would later be required to do for Lady Sarah.¹⁸²

When the girls arrived at Carton, Emily was twenty years of age and had been married for four years, she also had children of her own. Carton would become Louisa's home for the next seven years. At this time, Carton House was still being remodelled and the decoration of the interior was as yet incomplete. Thus while growing up Louisa would see painters and paperers, plasterers and stonecutters, masons and roadmakers, amongst others rushing to and fro. The demesne at Carton was also developed, the river was widened, roads and paths were cut, gardens and shrubberies were laid out and shrubs, trees and flowers were planted.¹⁸³ The work was supervised by Lord and Lady Kildare but when Lord Kildare was away, Louisa accompanied her sister. As she grew older, Louisa helped to manage both the household and Emily's ever-growing family. Louisa's role with her younger cousins was more like that of an older sister rather than that of an aunt. Whilst at Carton,

¹⁸¹ Reese, M M *Goodwood's Oak; The life and times of the third duke of Richmond, Lennox and Aubigny* (London, 1987) p17.

¹⁸² Lady Sarah although married to Sir Charles Bunbury, had an affair and then a daughter with her distant cousin Lord William Gordon in Dec. 1768, she left her husband and subsequently her lover and was given refuge by her brother, the third duke.

riding was Louisa's chief delight, something she would enjoy all her life. In May 1768 she wrote, 'I ride out before breakfast [each day]' and later in 1772 she wrote of how she was thrown from her horse into a ditch.¹⁸⁴ Inside the house, Louisa would also assist Emily in selecting the India taffetas, Nassau damasks, silks (for beds, curtains and chairs) and ormolu tables, enamelled pictures (Battersea) and china (Chelsea).¹⁸⁵ Whenever Emily travelled to England, Louisa and Sarah normally accompanied her to Holland House in London and Goodwood House.

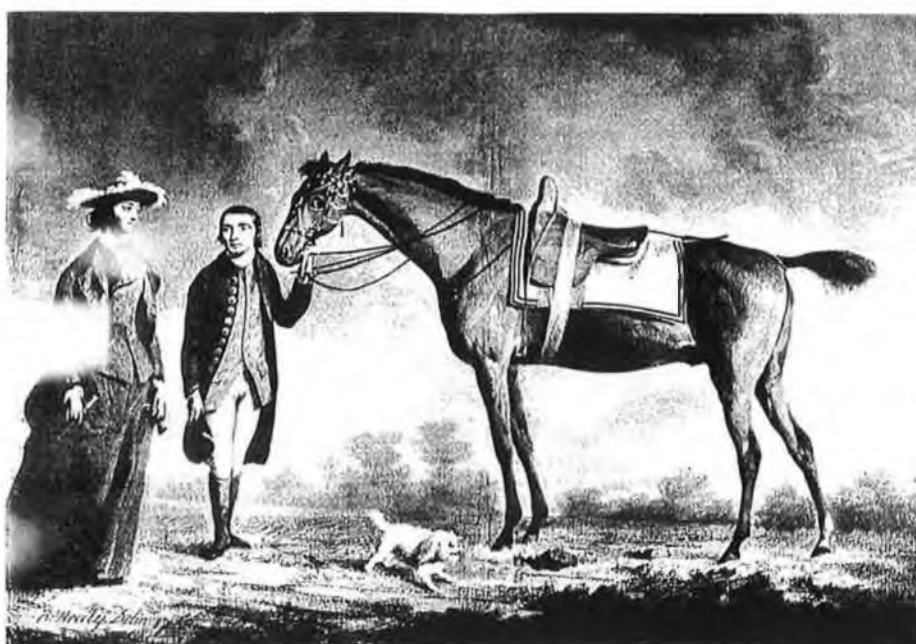


Fig. 44 Lady Louisa with a groom and her dog Hibou by Robert Healy.

During the Autumn of 1758 many parties were held for Louisa at Carton and in Dublin. Louisa was tall, much admired and had the full share of beauty peculiar to the Lennox sisters. The Lennox sisters led an informed but informal lifestyle and they were undoubtedly influential in society. Their company was much sought after by their contemporaries. After Lady Caroline Fox met her younger sister Lady Louisa

¹⁸³ Fitzgerald, *Lady Louisa Conolly* p14.

¹⁸⁴ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 17 May 1768 and 18 July 1772 (Castletown House letters).

¹⁸⁵ Fitzgerald, *Lady Louisa Conolly* p14.

she wrote that ‘Louisa is vastly liked... well behaved, gentle, modest and civil... tall and has so pretty a figure’.¹⁸⁶ Later in 1765, Lady Caroline reported, ‘The king [Louis XV, king of France] thinks Louisa very handsome... most people at Paris are of the same way of thinking, I’m told.’¹⁸⁷ Amongst her admirers was Lord Mornington¹⁸⁸ who presented himself and indeed proposed to Lady Louisa but he was refused. His aunt, Mrs Delany recorded that ‘the young lady had an insurmountable dislike to him’.¹⁸⁹ It was, however, Emily who found a husband for Louisa in the person of the Right Honourable Thomas Conolly. He was the perfect match being the richest man in Ireland and his family had been connected with patriot politics since the seventeenth century and thus could be relied on to support Lord Kildare and his patriot party. Conolly’s estate at Castletown was situated next to Carton so that for Emily, Louisa would scarcely be leaving home. Tom and Louisa were married on the 30 December 1758, just three weeks after her fifteenth birthday.

At Castletown, the young Lady Louisa was faced with the management of approximately one hundred and six servants and the organisation of the vast supplies used to maintain such a household. Lady Louisa immediately set about the decoration of the house and the management and organisation of the estate. She was a ‘most accurate calculator’ and used money and materials with the greatest economy.¹⁹⁰ Stone for building was quarried on the estate and timber was supplied from her own sawpit. It was generally agreed that Louisa was the kindest, wisest and most generous of creatures, having by comparison with her husband a goodly share of many

¹⁸⁶ Lady Caroline Fox to her sister, the countess of Kildare, 10 Apr. 1759, Leinster letters i, p208.

¹⁸⁷ Lady Caroline Fox to her sister, the countess of Kildare, 20 May 1765, Leinster letters i, p395.

¹⁸⁸ Garret Wellesley or Wesley (1735-1781) first earl of Mornington and first viscount Wellesley of Dangan; later father of the duke of Wellington.

¹⁸⁹ Fitzgerald, *Lady Louisa Conolly* p17.

virtues.¹⁹¹ Louisa's sisters agreed that Tom's only redeeming qualities were his love for Louisa and his unquestioned generosity. In 1759 Caroline wrote, 'Mr Conolly seems vastly good-natured; he seems immensely careful of Louisa and fond of her, and she of him' but only two weeks later she was to 'think him immensely silly... he is a tiresome boy... I hope and believe she [Louisa] won't find it out ever..'.¹⁹²



Fig. 45 Lady Louisa Conolly by Alan Ramsay

Lady Louisa's greatest wish was to have children of her own but this was one wish which was never granted. In 1762 Louisa was pregnant, as a result she did not travel

¹⁹⁰ Boylan, 'The Conollys of Castletown' p21.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. pp20-1.

¹⁹² Lady Caroline Fox to Countess of Kildare 3 Apr. 1759 and 17 Apr. 1759, Leinster Letters i, pp206 and 213.

to England for her beloved Sal's wedding preparations that same year.¹⁹³ In January Caroline wrote to Emily;

...I suppose you tell me Louisa is breeding, as in that of the 16th, which I have received, you say you fear she will miscarry, which is the first hint I had of it. Lady Strafford told me of [it] last night as a certain thing, and I hope to God she will go on, she will be so happy; I most truly rejoice at the news.¹⁹⁴

However, in February Louisa wrote to Sarah;

I am very sorry to tell you that all the hopes I had of being breeding are over, I am afraid I must not expect it now, to be sure I am mortified but I comfort myself with the thoughts of your having a Dr little child for me to mumble...¹⁹⁵

The fact that Louisa would never have children caused much concern for her within her family, Lord Kildare wrote in April, 'I am very sorry to hear there is no chance of Lady Louisa's being with child. I suppose the quiet life she leads is in the hopes of being so.'¹⁹⁶

Her life however did not remain completely childless, three nieces of her husbands would be reared at Castletown, Louisa and Harriet Staples and Maryanne Fitzgerald.¹⁹⁷ Their mothers had died while they were still very young children but it

¹⁹³ Lady Sarah Lennox was affectionately known to her sisters as Sal or Sally, she was about to be married to Sir Charles Bunbury.

¹⁹⁴ Lady Caroline Fox to the Countess of Kildare, 27 Jan. 1762, Leinster Letters i, p310,

¹⁹⁵ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 27 Feb. 1762 (Castletown House letters).

¹⁹⁶ Earl of Kildare to the Countess of Kildare, 20 Apr. 1762, Leinster Letters i, p119.

¹⁹⁷ Louisa and Harriet, daughters of the Right Honourable John Staples MP of Lissane, Co. Tyrone and Harriet Conolly; Maryanne, daughter of George Robert 'Fighting' Fitzgerald and Jane Conolly.

was never the same as having a child of her own. 'I have got Mrs Staple's [sic] two little girls into my care, they are to live with me, but I believe I told you of it before, I shall grow very fond of them I do suppose.'¹⁹⁸ In 1771 she wrote that

Louisa Staples improves, but I don't feel as if I should ever have the same kind of love for her that I have for my Sister Leinsters Children and your little wee..... I have no doubt of loving her enough as I think it is impossible to breed up a Child that is tollerable without loving it...¹⁹⁹

While Lady Louisa dearly loved her little Fitzgerald nieces and nephews, she didn't approve of the number of children that Emily had. In March 1770 she reported, 'General Sandford stopped my chair yesterday to enquire after you, and he cried, "The sixteenth child? God forgive her!"'²⁰⁰ Later in October 1771 Emily was pregnant with her eighteenth child and Louisa wrote '... 'tis really too ridiculous now she does breed, I now give up the hopes of her leaving off, till she can go on no longer.'²⁰¹ Emily gave birth to her twenty-second child in May 1778, she was forty seven years of age.

Later in September of 1771, there was talk of the Right Honourable John Staples marrying again, Lady Louisa wrote;

as for Mr Staple's [sic] marrying you have a bad chance of their [Louisa and Harriet]

¹⁹⁸ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 18 June 1771 (Castletown House letters).

¹⁹⁹ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 13 Aug. 1771 (Castletown House letters).

²⁰⁰ Lady Louisa to the Duchess of Leinster, 4 Mar. 1770 (NLI, The Fitzgerald Correspondence, Ms 611, p24).

²⁰¹ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 1 Oct. 1771 (Castletown House letters).

leaving me that way, for I have not a high opinion of the tenderness of a Step-Mother, and I should feel unwilling to let Mr Conollys Nieces go to a stranger. My reasons (if you will take them) for taking these Girls are these, first, I promised poor Mrs Staples who told me that she should die with the most perfect content if she thought I would take care of her eldest Girl, secondly, my pleasure in doing a kind thing by Mr Conolly, and thirdly, that there was none of her family (tho' so large) that could well take them, and Mr Staple's [sic] Family is so vulgar that I should have been sorry to have had anything belonging to Mr Conolly under their care, lastly I love Children, think them cheerful in a House and know that they will be a diversion to me, so that upon the whole you can understand my chusing to have them.²⁰²

The two little girls would endear themselves to Lady Louisa, the following year she wrote, 'I am growing vastly fond of little Harriet... I am growing fonder of her [Louisa] than I was...'²⁰³ Maryanne Fitzgerald (above page 94), died quite young and suddenly in April 1794 in Lady Louisa's arms. Tom and Louisa were very upset and found that the young girl had made a will, Louisa wrote that 'the legacies they say, put us into deep mourning, I am glad of it, feeling gratified at putting on a parent's mourning'.²⁰⁴ Lady Louisa had obviously influenced Maryanne during her short life for she left the sum of £500 for the poor of Celbridge. Lady Louisa invested the money and used the interest from it to pay a doctor at the fever hospital which was situated on the main street of Celbridge.

In 1783 Lady Sarah gave birth to her third child, Emily Napier. She already had a daughter, Louisa Bunbury from an earlier affair whilst she was married to Sir Charles

²⁰² Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 9 Sept. 1771 (Castletown House letters).

²⁰³ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 30 Aug. 1772 (Castletown House letters).

²⁰⁴ Lady Louisa to the Duchess of Leinster, 12 Apr. 1794, Leinster Letters iii, p424.

Bunbury. After a much publicised divorce in 1776, she married Colonel George Napier in 1782. When little Emily was born, Lady Louisa asked her sister if she could adopt the child, Lady Sarah hesitated but knowing that her daughter would never want for anything, Emily Napier came to live at Castletown in December 1784. She was just a year old. Emily was different from Tom's nieces, as far as Lady Louisa was concerned, for Emily was after all a blood relative and so Louisa became all that a mother could be to the child. She wrote to Sarah, 'Mr Conolly says she will be the prettiest Lennox that ever was seen, and I really do see a likeness to my sister Leinster'.²⁰⁵ And so dearest Emmy would spend her days with her aunt. Later Lady Louisa would make half hearted attempts to introduce Emily to prospective husbands but both knew that Emily would sacrifice her future to her aunt's old age. Louisa wrote to Emily in 1807;

'I certainly never cease thinking of you, and dreamt of you the whole night,....In short, my love, my attachment to you is such, that it is like a lover's. I have not the words to express all that passes in my heart and thoughts about you'.²⁰⁶



Fig. 46 Lady Sarah Lennox at the age of fifteen.

²⁰⁵ Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p350.

²⁰⁶ Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p398.

During the second half of the eighteenth century the landed classes were caught up by the idea of what was called at the time ‘improvement’, planting, draining and enclosing, running farms themselves and encouraging their tenants to improve.²⁰⁷ In 1767 Lady Louisa began to re-landscape some of the ground near the river, which she thought was too flat either for interest or beauty. The following decade was taken up with the digging of a pond between the front of the house and the river. ‘We are also doing the Pond, which will be tollerably pretty as a river and very usefull for fish, ice and manure’.²⁰⁸ Such a task required large numbers of labourers to initiate the project and it started by destroying an earlier lake. In June 1776, one hundred and ninety men were employed to dig the pond and alter the level of the ground around it. The following month, two hundred and fifty one men were each paid 12d a day to line the lake and dig the foundations for the cascade near the river. ‘You must know that we are finishing the alteration of the pond and all the pretty pleasant work is going on by the River side, which diverts me as much as you can imagine’.²⁰⁹ Work continued through the autumn when a water-course was dug which ran from the pond to the river. ‘The Pond is turned into a River, and three cascades made in a cut, that is carried down to the River which I also think are very pretty’.²¹⁰

During the following two years, ditches were removed, walls were rebuilt and trees were felled. The work extended alongside the River Liffey with another cascade and slabs of rock were laid in the river bank.²¹¹ In March 1777 Lady Louisa wrote ‘my chief business has been the Kitchen Garden... we are also rearing the Grape House

²⁰⁷ Girourard, *Life in the English country house* p217.

²⁰⁸ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 17 Aug. 1776 (Castletown House letters).

²⁰⁹ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 20 Aug. 1778 (Castletown House letters).

²¹⁰ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, Jan. 1779 (Castletown House letters).

²¹¹ Fitzgerald, Brian *Lady Louisa Conolly 1743-1821: An Anglo Irish biography* (London, 1950).

and I am grown so *wise* about fruit trees'.²¹² In 1777 Louisa refers to the 'great Matter' which was;

'a little room of 13 feet square for a bathing dressing room, but as it is in a conspicuous place, it was necessary to ornament it a little and my contrivance has been great, in making the Pillars of some Door cases taken out of the Gallery do, which I think they will in *perfection*'.²¹³



47 View of Castletown looking across the pond.

A temple-like building was erected in 1781 by the builder and plasterer, Mr Jenkinson,²¹⁴ it was a small circular building with a domed roof. The temple had a dramatic view of the house and the famous Celbridge rapids. Later in 1781 Lady Louisa would dedicate the temple to her favourite actress, Sarah Siddons.²¹⁵ During the eighteenth century men were paid for rolling and raking the gravelpaths, for pruning the shrubberies and for draining and digging rushes. Also the glasshouses were glazed and the large walled gardens, situated beside the long avenue, were

²¹² Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah, 25 Mar. 1777 (Castletown House letters).

²¹³ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah 17 Nov. 1777 (Castletown House letters); this building no longer exists.

²¹⁴ No first name given.

²¹⁵ The temple can still be seen by the River Liffey today.

planted. Towards the end of the century, Louisa's schemes diminished although her enthusiasm did not '... we amuse ourselves with planning a thousand little improvements which will never take place, but we think that they will while we are talking and that does just as well.'²¹⁶ Her enthusiasm for new developments obviously had not left her but her means had changed. Rents had not been forthcoming from the northern estates due to bad harvests and the great suffering of the tenants. It was about this time, in 1777 that Lady Louisa began to devote herself to the well-being of the poor in Celbridge and the neighbourhood.



Fig. 48 Lady Louisa walking the grounds with the gamekeeper by Robert Healy.

The chip hat industry was peculiar to Celbridge at the end of the eighteenth century. It was established in the 1770s by William Wadsworth. Lady Louisa herself may have designed straw bonnets in Celbridge and indeed set the fashion for wearing them. As early as 1761 she was writing to her sister Sarah in London and begging her

²¹⁶ Moore, 'Lady Louisa Conolly' p137.

to send on 'a dozen of fine large chip hats'. An article of the *Hull Advertiser* on the 23 July 1796 read;

The straw bonnets now so much the fashion originated in Ireland and from a praiseworthy motive in Lady Louisa Conolly who to employ the poor of Celbridge, a little village near Castletown, the seat of her ladyship and Mr Conolly, instituted a manufacture of straw into hats and bonnets which rapidly improved and gave bread to hundreds. Females were the manufacturers.

Bowden in his *Tour of Ireland* referred to the manufactory and stated that the queen and princesses had honoured it by condescending to wear its products. Lady Louisa must have been very proud of the success of the Celbridge chip hat factory and the extent of export trade.²¹⁷

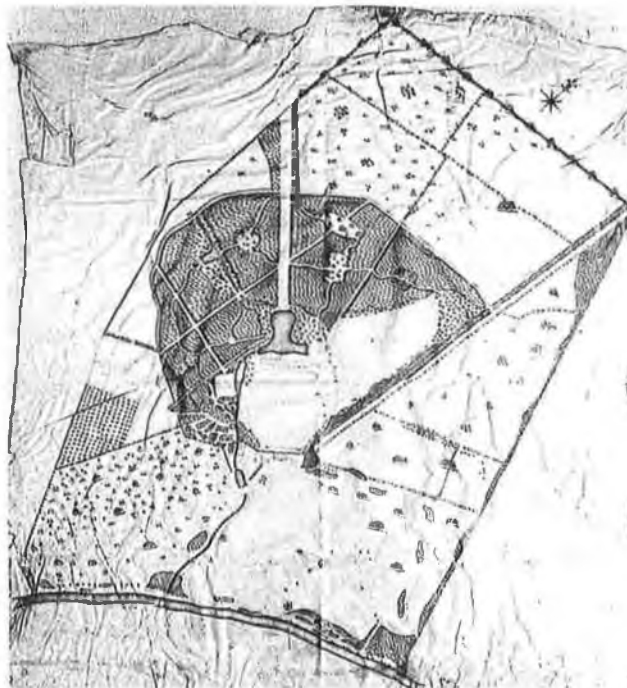


Fig. 49 Map of Castletown estate from the mid-eighteenth century, note the avenues, walkways and woodland.

²¹⁷ Boylan, Lena 'Lady Louisa Conolly's Chip Hat Factory' JKAS, xv (1971-6), pp468-71.

The year 1798 was one which caused much distress for Lady Louisa and her family. This was caused by the involvement of her favourite nephew, Lord Edward Fitzgerald with the United Irishmen and his subsequent arrest and death on 4 June in Newgate Gaol, Green street in Dublin. Her sister Lady Sarah was a committed rebel, Tom Conolly however sided with the government, the family was divided. Furthermore twelve Castletown servants and workmen were arrested along with Lady Sarah's footman. Lady Sarah by this time was living at a house in Celbridge at the opposite end of the village to Castletown.²¹⁸ It was Lady Louisa and another Fitzgerald nephew, Lord Henry who were the last members of the family to see Lord Edward alive. It took much negotiation on Lady Louisa's behalf to be allowed to see her dying nephew. She then had the difficult task of informing her sister Emily of her son's death and indeed how he had been before he died. Lady Louisa concentrated in her letter not on recriminations but on presenting a picture of Lord Edward as her sister would like to remember him.

More arrests followed Lord Edward's capture, this persuaded what was left of the United Irishmen leadership that the rebellion must begin immediately. In a letter to her brother the duke, Lady Louisa described the rebellion;

...in this sad rebellion Wexford is the worst, the county of Kildare next, in which we live, and we are surrounded by different posts of insurgents. The Grand Camp is about 9 miles away at a place called Timaloo [Timahoe] upon the borders of the Bog of Allen. At prosperous, a place about the same distance, there is another settlement of them. Kilcock, 6 miles from here was taken possession of last night, so that we

²¹⁸ Boylan, 'The Conollys of Castletown' p37.

may be annoyed from any of those places. Poor Castletown is turned into a Garrison. We have 18 soldiers sleeping in our drawing room and the house put in such a state of defence at night with the help of servants as they tell me would stand a siege and a sentinel continually on the roof to watch for the enemy. There are 80 men at Celbridge and 300 at Leixlip the conjunction of which will I hope make a stand against them.²¹⁹

Tom's political career finished with the act of union in 1800, after this he and Louisa considered moving to England. They travelled for a while but always returning to Castletown where Tom died in 1803 in Lady Louisa's arms. 'The last articulate words that he uttered (holding my hand) were "I have left you all I could, knowing you will make better use of it than I ever should"'.²²⁰ Louisa was surprised to find in the year after Tom's death evidence of a mistress. She wrote;

I met with a blow which almost overcame me. That of a mistress having been in question for many years back. You know enough of the mould in which I am cast to comprehend what such a discovery cost me, but I am determined on behaving towards his memory as I would have endeavoured (at least) to have done towards himself. Resignation, patience and no complaint are the way to shut the door against one's worst enemy, one's own passions; and jealousy having always been a strong ingredient in my composition, I resolved on giving it no admittance, for women cannot be judges of men's sentiment upon that subject.²²¹

She later wrote;

²¹⁹ Lady Louisa to the third duke of Richmond, June 1798 (Castletown House letters).

²²⁰ Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p399.

²²¹ Lady Louisa to third duke of Richmond, 1804 (Castletown House letters).

My rooted affection for him remains unshaken, and I cherish the hope that when Death... shall again unite us, I shall not be disappointed of that pure love, that with me, had begun this side of the grave. The worth and excellence of his character I can contemplate with pleasure and venerate the same, making his opinions... my chief guide.²²²

After Tom's death in 1803 Lady Louisa found herself quite badly off. She prepared for the sale of her beloved Castletown perhaps to be used as a barracks by the government. The architect Francis Johnston inspected the house and accepted the asking price of £30,000. However the authorities thought this was too expensive and turned the offer down. As a result, other Conolly properties were sold and Louisa would after this live in reduced circumstances. Louisa immediately began to economise, she had never really been interested in display or grandeur and hated waste. Her sister Sarah wrote in 1811 'my dear perfect sister... unites prudence with all her actions, spends the money she was allotted for its maintenance in doing all that is necessary rather than showy, so while it looks neglected the essentials are well done'. Lady Louisa grieved the death of her husband for many years and devoted her time to local employment schemes, education and charity work. Her love of Castletown was a very real thing and from now on she could dedicate herself solely to its upkeep and the welfare of her tenants.

In 1814 Lady Louisa was concerned with mending the roof of the old kennels at the slip²²³ where she hoped to revive some of her former plans regarding a school of

²²² Tillyard, *Aristocrats* p402.

²²³ Laneway outside the Castletown gates which leads down to the River Liffey known locally as the slip.

industry and thus to continue with 'spinning and knitting and weaving our yarn'. That same year Lady Louisa opened a school at the Castletown gates on the old kennel site where Tom had originally kept his hunting hounds. Castletown had a well-established pack of 'fox-dogs', Tom had recruited his hounds from the Belvoir pack, one of the most famous packs in England. The Castletown pack reached its highest point of excellence during the period 1770-80. Tom Conolly was also instrumental in the establishment of the Irish Turf Club in the eighteenth century and can be considered one of the fathers of Irish racing as it is today.

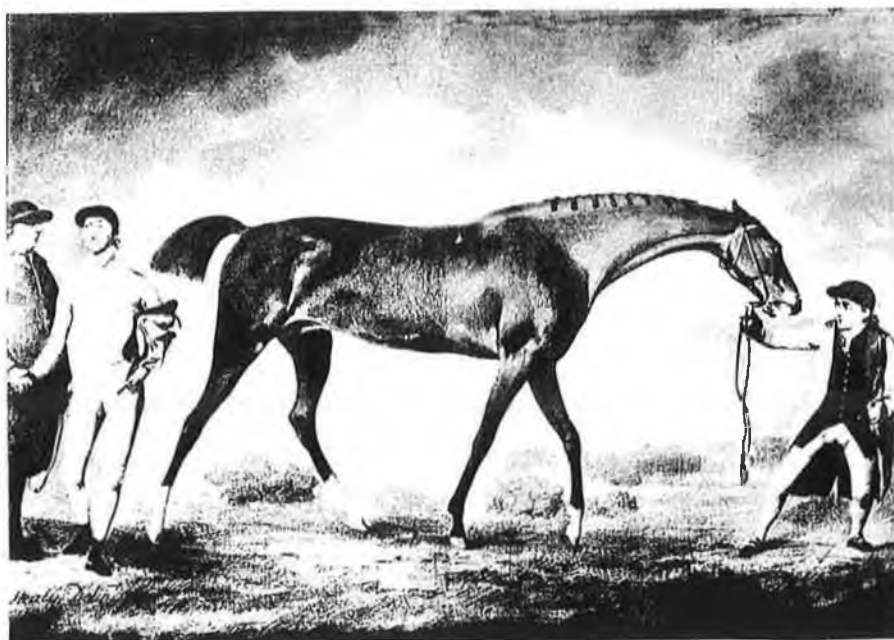


Fig. 50 Tom Conolly (dressed as jockey) with a racehorse by Robert Healy.

This school built on the kennel site was the first school in the village of Celbridge where education was free. Pupils attending the other centres had to pay to support the teachers. It was intended for Protestants but when Lady Louisa discovered that within a few months, there were Catholics attending, she wrote;

we have quite a creditable school of forty five children held by John Holt for Protestant

children, but I have had the satisfaction of seeing many Catholics among them. I asked no questions, but examined their writing and spelling equally and pleased myself with the thought that I had Catholics and Protestants all mixed up, as they should be, and growing up together in their childhood, in all probability it will make them grow up with cordiality towards each other. As soon as I get home and can get the roof of the old kennel mended, I shall enlarge the plan and get more things taught than merely the reading writing and arithmetic²²⁴

Her plan did not materialise until six years later in 1820 when Lady Louisa had built upon the kennel site the first industrial schools ever built in Ireland. They were to educate and give employment to the catholic poor but children from all denominations attended. There were workshops for the boys which taught carpentering, tailoring, shoemaking, basketmaking, and other trades. The girls were taught knitting, sewing, laundry work, breadmaking, cooking, the plaiting of straw of making bonnets amongst others. Religious instruction was given one day a week in separate rooms by their own clergymen.²²⁵ In this way an educational project became a religious one, something that could to Lady Louisa's mind heal the rifts which the rebellion of 1798 had brought so starkly into the open.

Lady Louisa was her own architect, designing every building she erected including field gates and fences. The materials used; timber, stone, lime and sand were all the produce of the estate. The same was true of all the materials used in the industrial school. Louisa did what she could for the well-being and education of everybody

²²⁴ Lady Louisa to Lady Sarah Napier, 29 Nov. 1814 (Castletown House letters).

²²⁵ Fitzgerald, *Lady Louisa Conolly* p183.

living on the estate and took a personal interest in every employee. After Tom's death she occupied herself constantly with the affairs of Celbridge;

where from my long residence I have a degree of influence in a humble circle, that I ought to make use of. There is a school here dependent on this property, which falls to my care, and various other attentions to this neighbourhood where manufactures from England are now establishing themselves, looking sometimes at me for countenance under the little difficulties that occur.²²⁶

Mark Kelly²²⁷ wrote of Lady Louisa;

I remember often seeing her pass out of the garden to the house, dressed in her usual long, light-grey cloth pelisse or surtout, having huge side pockets, and those pockets stuck full of the largest parsnips and carrots, their small ends appearing above; these being doubtless for the poor, who were permitted to come to the house two or three times a week for food etc.

Lady Louisa died in 1821 and her death is recorded by her nephew George Napier in a letter to one of his children. He had been at Castletown for the few months prior to her death. His own sister Emily had lived at Castletown since she was an infant. Lady Louisa had really been more of a mother to her than an aunt. Before her death Lady Louisa had sent for the man who was to conduct her funeral and told him;

to recollect that as the vault in the old church had not been opened for many years,

²²⁶ Letter to her brother, the duke of Richmond, 20 Apr. 1806 (Castletown House letters)

²²⁷ The servant who wound the clocks at Castletown House quoted in Fitzgerald, *Lady Louisa Conolly* p183.

there would be a great deal of foul air, which was dangerous, and to take care that none of the workmen should run any risk in opening it.²²⁸



Fig. 51 Lady Louisa in later years.

When Lady Louisa came near the time of her death, it was her dying wish to die looking at the house. In the absence of having any children of her own, she bestowed her maternal instincts on Castletown, her love for Castletown was a very real thing. Lady Louisa died seated in a small tent on the front lawn looking up at the house that she had devoted her life to. Before she was placed in her coffin ‘the poor labourers and others of the village wished to be allowed to see the body’ to which George of course consented.²²⁹

George Napier watched from a recess in Lady Louisa’ room where he could see the people file past without being observed. In his own words;

²²⁸ From an undated document with the Castletown letters entitled ‘ Extract from my brother’s memoirs’
²²⁹ *ibid.*

every poor person after seeing her passed onto another room (and not seeing me in the recess) conceived themselves alone and unobserved, I had full opportunity of witnessing their natural feelings, and if ever gratitude for benefits conferred, and deep affliction, nay I may say despair for the loss of a parent was depicted in the countenance of human beings, it was so in those of these poor Irish catholics! One old white-headed man took her cold lifeless hand and kissing it sobbed out 'Oh, my dear, my sweet lady, my long tried, my old friend, why, why, have you left your poor old creature to die alone. You who used to come to his bedside when he was sick, and cheer him up with your good word, and give him the drop of soup, and the bit of meat, and tell him to have comfort, and now you're gone before me after all. But I'll not stay long, I'll follow you, for you'll clear the way for a poor old sinner like myself, and God will receive me from you'.²³⁰

Another much younger man, who again kissed her hand, knelt down and looking towards heaven exclaimed aloud;

the priest may tell me what he likes he may cane the heretic, and swear the protestant goes not to heaven, but neither priest or bishop, or all the priests that ever lived, shall persuade me, she is not gone to heaven and rests at peace in the bosom of a just and merciful god. No, no, if the soul of our dear sweet Lady Louisa, the poor mans friend and comforter is not gone to heaven, then there is no God, no mercy for the human race. Protestant, Catholic what is it but a name? But look at her, look at the tears of the poor, the old, the young, the infirm, the helpless and tell me ye priests if these are not her passports to heaven. Yes, you are cold and lifeless and you hear not the wailings of those you cherished as your children. But your bright spirit is above and will look down upon us, who have no friend left since you are gone.²³¹

²³⁰ *ibid.*

Like the rest of her family, Lady Louisa was a handsome woman but it was the exceptional nobility of her character that made her so well known and admired. She had a strong personality and a high position but she employed them entirely for the use of others. Lady Louisa was not only the confidant of her numerous relations but it was to her that the poor people came when they were in trouble, even those condemned to death. 'One undivided desire possessed her mind - it was not to seem right, but to do right.'²³²

²³¹ *ibid.*

²³² Written by Mrs Richard Napier (married to a nephew of Lady Louisa's), quoted in the introduction to NLI, the Fitzgerald Correspondence, Ms 611-4.

Conclusion

Castletown House is one of the most important houses in Ireland, in fact it might be described as the greatest Irish country house. Built to display the wealth and importance of one of the most powerful men in Ireland in the early eighteenth century, Speaker William Conolly. It was a house designed to impress more than anything else, to entertain and to influence. The years 1759-76 represent the period during which Castletown House was completely transformed.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Castletown in its formal function was considered rather out of date, indeed old fashioned, times had changed and so had contemporary taste. Society had become more informal and as a result the houses people lived in would become less formal in their function. During this seventeen year period Castletown was radically re-altered. Lady Louisa Conolly was the instigator of these changes and directly supervised much of the work herself and as far as was possible, the finest materials and best craftsmen were used. Although Castletown from the outside strikes visitors as the most unified and Italianate of Irish houses, the story of its fitting up is typically Irish.

Lady Louisa Conolly was a remarkable young woman, under her direction the interior of the house was changed entirely. The liveliness of her letters gives such wonderful colour to the history of Castletown in the eighteenth century and fortunately since then, only very minor changes have been made to the house, for the main interest of the Conollys was in good living and horses. Castletown House is essentially the house built by Speaker Conolly in 1722 but it is still imbued with the spirit of Lady Louisa Conolly and indeed pervaded by her charm.

Appendix 1

Glossary of architectural terms and others.

ARCHITRAVE	Lowest of the three main parts of an entablature; also more loosely, the moulded frame surrounding a door or window.
BAROQUE	Period covering the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth centuries; the term implies grandeur, spatial complexity and an interest in the excesses of both decorative elaboration and of light and shade.
BAY	A vertical division of the exterior or interior of a building marked not by walls but by fenestration, an order, buttresses, units of vaulting, etc.
CANTILEVER	A horizontal projection (e.g. A step, balcony, beam or canopy) supported by a downward force, without external bracing and thus appears to be self supporting.
CAPITAL	Head or crowning feature of a column.
CHAIR RAIL	A moulding round a room to prevent chairs, when pushed back against the walls, from damaging their surface.
CHIPPENDALE	Style combines solidity with grace and elaborate decoration usually in Chinese, gothic or rococo style. Named after Thomas Chippendale (1718-79), English furniture designer and cabinet maker.
COLONNADE	A row of columns carrying an entablature or arches.
CONSOLE	An ornamental bracket with a compound curved outline and usually of greater height than projection.
CORNICE	In classical architecture, the top, projecting section of an entablature; also any projecting ornamental moulding along the top of a building, wall, arch, etc., finishing or crowning it.

COVE	A large concave moulding, especially that produced by the arched junction of wall and ceiling in a 'cove ceiling'.
DADO	In modern architecture, the finishing of the lower part of an interior wall from floor to waist height.
ELEVATION	The external faces of a building.
ENFILADE	The system of aligning internal doors in a sequence so that a vista is obtained through a series of rooms when all the doors are open. They are usually placed close to the windows (as at Castletown House).
ENTABLATURE	The upper part of an order consisting of architrave, frieze and cornice.
FACADE	The front or face of a building, emphasised architecturally.
FRIEZE	The middle division of an entablature between the architrave and cornice usually decorated but may be plain. It also describes the decorated band along the upper part of an internal wall, immediately below the cornice.
GABLE	The triangular upper portion of a wall at the end of a pitched roof corresponding to a pediment in classical architecture
IONIC	One of the five classical orders. A column with an oblong to supported by two large volutes.
JIB/GIB DOOR	A concealed door flush with the wall surface painted or papered to correspond with the walls. The dado and other mouldings are similarly carried across the door.
MANTELPIECE	The wood, brick, stone or marble frame surrounding a fireplace, sometimes called a chimney-piece.
NEOCLASSICISM	Period of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when art reacting against the rococo turned to antiquity, a chaste and restrained style. Discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum urged artists back to the antique, hence the pompeiiian style.
NICHE	A vertical recess in a wall, pier, etc., usually arched and containing a statue, urn or other decorative object.
OVERDOOR	Also called <i>sopraporta</i> , a decorative feature above the door of a room, in harmony with the doorcase to form a decorative unit.

PEDIMENT	Signifying in classical architecture a low pitched gable above a portico, formed by running the top member of the entablature along the sides of the gable; also a similar feature above doors, windows etc.
PELMET	Fringe, valance or other device hiding a curtain rod.
PIER	The solid mass between doors, windows and other openings in buildings.
PILASTER	Shallow pier or rectangular column projecting only slightly from a wall and in classical architecture conforming with one of the orders.
POMPEIIANA	See neo-classicism.
PORTICO	A roofed space, open or partly enclosed, forming the entrance and centre piece of the facade of a temple, house or church, often with detached or attached columns and a pediment.
ROCOCO	Period of the mid-eighteenth century, the style continued the complexities of the baroque, it treated it as pure decoration, justified only in so far as it charmed the eye and amused the senses.
SKIRTING	The edging, usually of wood, fixed to the base of an internal wall.
STUCCO	Plasterwork usually rendered very smooth or modelled as in stucco ceilings.
WAINSCOT	The timber lining to walls.
WINDOW SASH	Cord with counter-balancing weights inside the jambs of the window where sliding glazed frames run in vertical grooves.

Taken from John Fleming, Hugh Honour and Nikolaus Pevsner *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture* (Middlesex, 1987)

Appendix 2

Castletown House remained in the ownership of the Conolly family until 1965 when it was put up for auction by the then owners, the Conolly-Carew family. The house and lands were purchased by a building speculator who subsequently divided up the estate, some of which was used for housing. The intention, it is believed, was to knock down the house and thus make all the land available for housing.

Fortunately the house and part of the estate was rescued in 1967 by the Hon. Desmond Guinness, founder and president at the time of the Irish Georgian Society, and the house became the headquarters of that society. Castletown opened to the public later that year, a barren shell of what it had previously been as the contents had been sold at auction a year earlier. It would be the first house to be open to the public in the province of Leinster. In 1979 Desmond Guinness established the Castletown Foundation, an educational charity to fund and run the house which depended on visitors and donations for its funding. This unfortunately was not enough to keep the house going.

Castletown House was placed in state care by the Castletown Foundation in January 1994. Since then it has been owned and managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) with the Foundation still remaining responsible for the contents. The house is now managed by the heritage service part of the department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht. However any future renovation or restoration will be undertaken

by the OPW. In 1994 the OPW carried out major repair work to the roof of the house replacing it completely and rebuilding the chimneys. This work took almost a year to complete and was funded by the European Union. At the moment phase two of the restoration work is about to start: this will involve rewiring the house for electricity, reworking the plumbing, restoring the red silk drawing room and carrying out some structural repairs within the house.

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