

# THE BIG HOUSES OF DÚN LAOGHAIRE-RATHDOWN

The Big House looms large in our shared cultural heritage in modern Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. The grandeur of these houses, built during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and often located at the heart of a large estate, was in complete contrast to the homes of ordinary Irish people at the time.



A view of Victoria Castle in Killiney, with Killiney Bay, Bray Head and the Sugarloaf in the distance (Courtesy Dominican Archives, Cabra).

Mount Merrion House, opposite the Mount Merrion estate, built c. 1818. The house was split into two during the early twentieth century, and later purchased for the South County Hotel. It was demolished in 1986 (dlr Local Studies).



'Servants' at Marlay House during filming of *Captain Lightfoot*, 1955 (Courtesy Love family).

The world of the Big House became increasingly unsteady as Ireland tilted towards independence, and the houses that survived the fires of the 1920s faced further change during the twentieth century as some were repurposed to house multiple families while others came under state and institutional ownership.



The Grange, Galloping Green, c. 1900. The big house and its lodge were demolished during the 1960s when the property was purchased as a headquarters for ESSO Ireland. The Grange apartment complex is now located on the site (Courtesy Mike Lee).

This exhibition takes a look at some of the many big houses scattered throughout the county, including those owned and operated by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council today. It accompanies *Shifting Foundations - The Big Houses of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown*, a publication produced as part of an overall programme of events, detailed on a separate flier.

This exhibition is an initiative of the Decade of Centenaries 2021 programme for Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, on the theme of the Big Houses of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown.

Some of the images used in this exhibition are taken from Gate Lodges, a 1996 display curated by Veronica and David Rowe for An Taisce South County Dublin Association, later donated to dlr Libraries. Special thanks are due to Veronica and David Rowe, Peter Pearson, and numerous individuals and institutions for their generous assistance.

Many of the buildings featured in this exhibition are located on private property and should not be entered without prior permission.



Somerset, Stradbroom, c. 1980. The bow ended Georgian house, built c. 1800, sat on ten acres and survived until 1987, when it was demolished (Courtesy Peter Pearson).

Researched and compiled by David Gunning, dlr Historian in Residence.

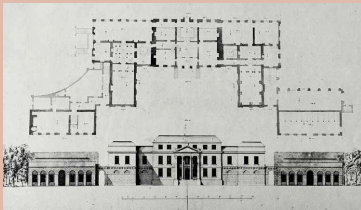
# BEGINNINGS OF THE BIG HOUSE



*Carysfort Farmlands* by Veronica Heywood, July 1990. This watercolour presents a view of the former Carysfort estate in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. The Stillorgan Obelisk, visible at left, is one of the only remaining features of the estate today (Courtesy Veronica Heywood).

The story of the big house in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown differs from the more rural counties of the country, and it is noteworthy that there are no very substantial country houses in this region of south County Dublin. This is partly explained by the proximity to the capital city, as well as the disappearance of the larger houses with extensive demesnes that once occupied the area.

The gradual dispossession of native Irish landowners, and the development of a more ordered and centralised system of land management in Ireland from the seventeenth century, saw ownership and control of the land assumed by the Protestant Ascendancy, the new political and social elite that would dominate Ireland until the early twentieth century - the landlord's big house and estate stood at the heart of this system.



Plans for proposed remodelling of Stillorgan Park House by Edward Lovett Pearce, c. 1730. Pearce designed the Stillorgan Obelisk for Lord Allen around the same time but his plans for the big house were never executed. The architect leased Grove House on the Allen estate and died there in 1733. Grove House was later known as Tigh Lorcaín Hall before it was demolished for Stillorgan Bowling Alley during the 1960s (dlr Local Studies).

Among the first estates to be created in the modern dlr area was that of Stillorgan, purchased in 1684 by Joshua Allen, the son of a Dutch architect and builder. Along with the Domville family, who had been granted lands at nearby Loughlinstown, Allen was recorded as a major landholder in the area at the close of the seventeenth century. His lands included Stillorgan village, Newtownpark, and portions of Blackrock. In 1695, he built the imposing Stillorgan Park House, a wide, seven-windowed mansion which faced west up a double avenue of trees, and laid out a well planted demesne that included a deer park. Loughlinstown House, one of the oldest and largest surviving houses in the region today, was built by Sir William Domville, the Attorney General in Ireland in 1660.

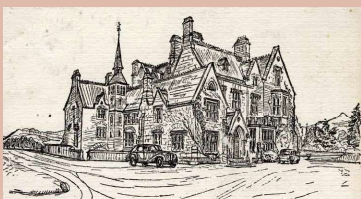


A view of the deer park at Mount Merrion by William Ashford, c. 1805. Deer parks, a large enclosed area of land attached to a country house, were an important source for food and hunting. A portion of the former deer park at Mount Merrion was opened as a public park in 1971 (Courtesy Fitzwilliam Museum).



Loughlinstown House, 1985. The former home of the Domville family, it remains standing and serves as headquarters for Eurofound today (Courtesy Peter Pearson).

The Fitzwilliam family, a prominent presence in Dublin from the thirteenth century, are an example of an Old English family who managed to hold onto their estates in the area. Like the Talbotts of Malahide Castle, who held lands at Rochestown, the Fitzwilliams publicly renounced their Catholic faith in order to maintain their power. The Fitzwilliam or Pembroke estate, as it came to be known, was vast, extending from Merrion Square to Blackrock, up to Dundrum and Ticknock. The land was abutted by Lord Trimleston's Roebuck estate at Mount Merrion. In Shanganagh, much of the land was held by the Roberts, later Riall family. Meanwhile, the Longford and De Vesci estate owned lands near the coast at Monkstown and Dunleary which consisted largely of very unpromising scrubland in the eighteenth century.



Drawing of Old Conna Hill, c. 1960. The house, a Victorian Gothic mansion which later operated as a hotel and school during the twentieth century, was built c. 1865 and replaced Mount Eden, the home of John Roberts, which previously stood on the site (Courtesy John Holohan).

# LIFE IN THE BIG HOUSE

During the eighteenth century, much of the land in the region was divided into large estates amongst important landholding families who played prominent roles in Irish public life and society. They generally let their arable outlying territory to farmers and middlemen, and collected rents from the tenants on the land.

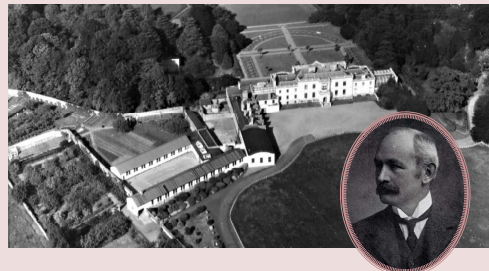
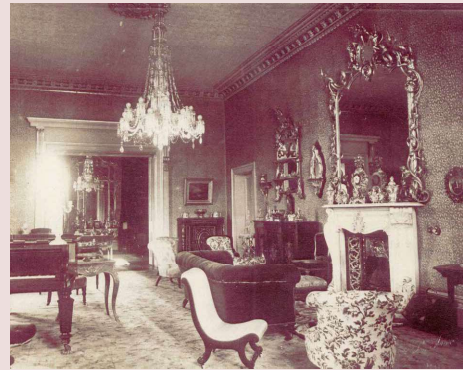


LUDFORD PARK, BALLINTEER, DUNDUM,  
CO. DUBLIN



ON APPROXIMATELY 47 STATUTE ACRES

Ludford Park, Ballinteer, was a simple Georgian farmhouse before a grander facade was added to the building, pictured in 1962. The property was advertised for sale in 1959 and later purchased by Wesley College. It serves as the principal's residence today (Courtesy Wesley College).



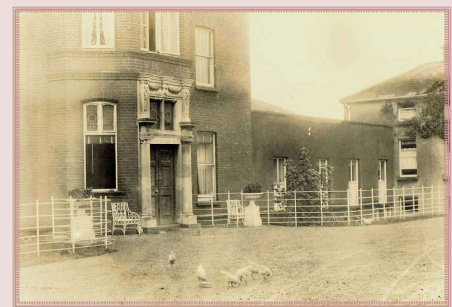
Aerial view of St Helen's, Booterstown, c. 1950. St Helen's is one of the largest and grandest surviving big houses in the county. The property of Sir John Nutting, director of the Dublin and Kingstown Railway during the early twentieth century, the house was later sold to the Christian Brothers. It is now the Radisson Blu St Helen's Hotel (Courtesy Provincial Archives, Christian Brothers).

Drawing Room of Boley House, also known as Bloomsbury, Monkstown, c. 1944. Standing on seventeen acres, the house was owned by Sir Valentine Grace during the twentieth century. His son, Raymond, enlisted in the RIC in 1920 and the IRA attempted to assassinate him the following year. Family lore includes a visit to the house by the IRA around the same time - a gun was held to Lady Grace's head and the family was warned not to entertain British soldiers. Boley was sold in 1944 and later demolished. A single granite gate pier on Monkstown Avenue is all that remains of the estate today (Courtesy Hamilton-Tarley family).

Wealthy landowners retained a demesne for their own use and erected grand houses in all sorts of architectural styles. House interiors were designed to showcase wealth and taste, being smartly decorated with furniture, antiques, paintings and books purchased in Dublin, London or on the Grand Tour.

While landowners maintained their houses in this region, they did not serve as full time residences as the owners often had homes in Dublin city or estates elsewhere in the country and in England. Stillorgan Park House, at the centre of the Allen lands which came to be known as the Proby or Carysfort estate, was later vacated in favour of Glenart Castle in Arklow. The Domviles relocated to Templeogue House and later Santry Court in north Dublin after 1751. The Longford and De Vesci estate had no family residence in the area as the landlords were based in Counties Westmeath and Leix. The Fitzwilliam estate never had the completed mansion house which one would have expected to have been built at Mount Merrion, at the head of its once private driveway - Merrion Avenue. The close proximity to Dublin city meant that the houses were very often leased to leading churchmen, civil servants and politicians acting for the British administration in Ireland.

From the mid eighteenth century, as coastal areas like Blackrock developed as bathing and health resorts, landowners recognised the development potential of their lands as well-to-do residents of Dublin sought to escape the pollution and poverty of the city. They began leasing plots on outlying areas of their estates for constructing villas. The Fitzwilliam estate embarked on property development and sold plots for building all around Blackrock and Booterstown. Further inland, the entire townland of Drummartin near Dundrum was let in 1781 and a new road to Kilmacud was opened to assist with its development.



Blackrock House, c. 1890. Built by Sir John Lees, Secretary of the Irish Post Office, the house was one of a small number of eighteenth century mansions constructed with red brick. It stood on a coastal estate of over twenty acres that stretched along the coast to Seapoint. Blackrock House was a popular seasonal let for successive Lord Lieutenants from the time of its completion in 1774. The building was divided into flats during the 1940s (Courtesy Dawn Hockett).



Drummartin Castle, 1970s. Built c. 1781, the front facade had five Wyatt windows and a large decorative fanlight above the door. It was split into two residences during the twentieth century and demolished for apartments in 1984 (Courtesy Irish Architectural Archive, Kevin Harrington Collection).

# DEVELOPING THE DEMESNE



Watercolour view of Kingstown Harbour and Killiney Hill Obelisk from Carrickmines by William Craig, 1849. The painting shows the rural character that the area retained into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Courtesy National Gallery of Ireland).



Court-na-Farraige, Killiney, c. 1950. The house, in the style of a French chateau, was built by the sea at Killiney in 1865 (dlr Local Studies).

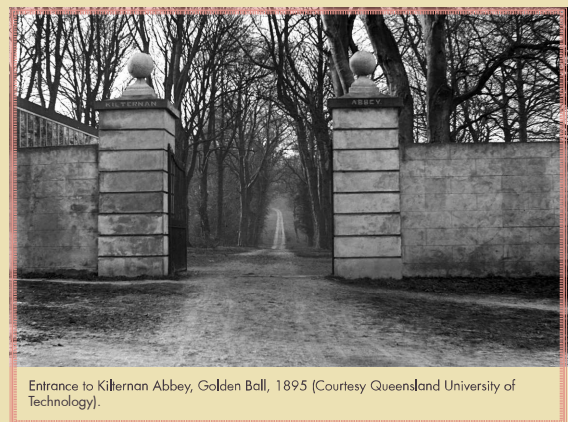
By the middle of the nineteenth century, coastal areas at Blackrock, Monkstown, Kingstown, Dalkey and Killiney were well established with mansions and villas. Before 1840, much of the land in the area was completely rural and this remained the case further inland, where land was used for agriculture and quarrying. Ballybrack was developed from 1811 when over one hundred acres of Domville land was leased to two builder-developers with the proviso that they construct houses of good quality. The Foxrock estate, formerly owned by the archbishop of Dublin, was developed as a garden suburb from the 1860s, with building sites of a few acres laid out for mansions and villas.

The inhabitants of the new houses that sprang up during the nineteenth century, generally on plots of between two to twenty acres with gate lodge and coach houses included, were varied. While there was a distinctly Protestant presence in the area, many of the houses were also purchased or built by middle class Catholic professionals. The owners of these houses included successful bankers, brewers, manufacturers, merchants, and military men, as well as members of the legal and medical professions. Houses were also investments that were often used as seasonal rentals, particularly in Dalkey and Killiney, for wealthy families living in the city or foreign visitors from further afield.



Kiltiernan Abbey, Golden Ball, 1895 (Courtesy Queensland University of Technology).

The later years of the nineteenth century saw the disintegration of many smaller estates, particularly those close to the coast, as suburban housing expanded around the towns of the county. The former walled gardens at Maretimo in Blackrock were repurposed as a tram depot, for which the landowner, Lord Cloncurry, was compensated as his grandfather had been when the railway was built across his coastal lands earlier in the century. By 1876, the larger landowners in the area included railway and canal companies as well as the different urban districts of the county. The big estates included Golden Ball near Kiltiernan (1,975 acres), Eaton Brae (1,162 acres) and The Aske in Shankill (1,752) while the absentee Carysfort, Domville and Pembroke estates continued to own thousands of acres between them.



Entrance to Kiltiernan Abbey, Golden Ball, 1895 (Courtesy Queensland University of Technology).



Nerano, Dalkey, 1985. Nerano, a plain Georgian house located above Colliemore Harbour, was altered during the nineteenth century and took the appearance of a seaside villa. It was offered for sale for over 7m in 2021 (dlr Local Studies).

# WARTIME LOYALTIES

The years leading up to and following Irish independence were a tumultuous time for the owners and occupiers of big houses. As a symbol of the British occupation of Ireland, some were targeted and destroyed during the War of Independence, generally in retaliation for attacks by crown forces. The Civil War period saw the greatest destruction of big houses in Ireland, many within the Leinster area, as Free State forces and anti-Treaty IRA fought for control of the country. Within the modern Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown region, Kilteragh House, the Foxrock home of Senator Horace Plunkett, was the only big house to be totally destroyed, though other properties were attacked and raided.



Drawing showing front view of Kilteragh House, Foxrock, by architect William Douglas Caroe, 1904. The Arts and Crafts style house, sitting in a ninety acre demesne, was a unique modern residence at the time of its construction in 1905 (Courtesy Irish Architectural Archive).



The smoldering ruins of Kilteragh House, Foxrock. The house was destroyed in January 1923 following orders from Con Moloney, anti-Treaty IRA commander, to destroy the houses of senators as reprisal for Free State executions of anti-Treaty republicans (Courtesy Liam Clare).

The dlr area was viewed as a largely loyal and affluent region in the country. Though the occupants of local big houses varied in politics and religion, they were largely unionist and Protestant, and certainly viewed as such by the Irish. However, it is important to note that religion and class did not always define politics - Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Robert Emmet, two key figures in early Irish republicanism, were both members of the Protestant Ascendancy and grew up in big houses in the area.



Casino House, Milltown, c. 1900. Robert Emmet, leader of the ill-fated Irish rebellion of 1803, spent much of his childhood here. His father was physician to the Lord Lieutenant during the eighteenth century, and Casino was bought as a country home for the family (Courtesy Vivien Igoe).

The outbreak of World War One in 1914 saw local big houses including Leopardstown Park, Cabinteely House, Dunedin in Monkstown, and Corrig Castle in Kingstown given over for use as military hospitals and depots. Many families, particularly women, showed their support by dedicating time and finances to the war cause. In Blackrock, Lady Arnott, like many society ladies, held garden parties in aid of wounded soldiers in the gardens at Dunardagh.



Monte Alverno, Dalkey, c. 1905. The house was reputedly used as a billet by the British military during the War of Independence, and an officer is said to have been shot in the library (Courtesy John Holohan).



Clonskeagh Castle, c. 1975 (Courtesy Irish Architectural Archive, Kevin Harrington Collection).

The big houses of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown were aligned with the British empire in the years preceding the War of Independence, and their occupants were viewed as loyal subjects of the British crown. Several big houses were even occupied by the British military, including Killiney Castle, Monte Alverno in Dalkey, and Clonskeagh Castle. The British also used demesne lands for camping and training, and the sunken grotto at Stillorgan Park was reportedly used as a rifle range.



The Grotto, Stillorgan, c. 1900. Designed by Edward Lovett Pearce, it formed part of a designed walkway through the gardens of Stillorgan Park House. It survives today on the grounds of a private house (Courtesy Irish Architectural Archive).

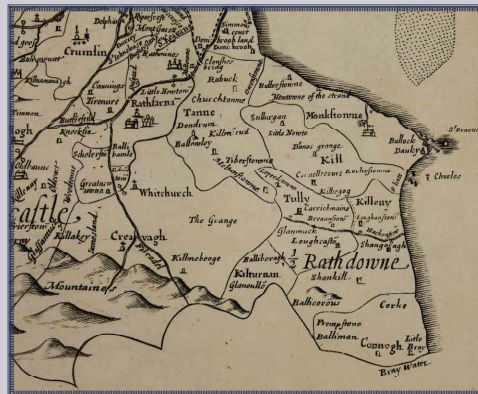
# THE MAKING OF MARLAY DEMESNE

Marlay House, located in the north-west of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, is most associated with the La Touche family, a banking and parliamentary dynasty, originally from France, who first came to Ireland in 1690. The La Touches were responsible for the design and layout of much of what is seen in the public park at Marlay today.

The land at Marlay was known as Balgeeth, meaning town of the wind, during the twelfth century when it was granted to the monks of St Mary's Abbey in Dublin city. The abbey held a large amount of land throughout the county, including at Bullock and Monkstown. The land at Balgeeth was used as a farm or grange to provide food and fuel for the abbey and came to be known as the 'Grange in the Marsh'. St Mary's Abbey also leased lands to tenants, and the Harold family were prominent landholders in the area from the middle of the thirteenth century. The Harolds came to control a huge amount of land throughout the county until they were dispossessed following the 1641 Rebellion. Their name survives today in local place names including Harold's Grange Road.



Filming at Marlay House during the production of *Captain Lightfoot*, 1955. The La Touche coat of arms is visible on the roof parapet above the front door. The original Grange is partially obscured by trees at right (Courtesy Love family).



Detail from Petty's map of Ireland (1655) showing 'The Grange', in the western region of modern Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (dlr Local Studies).

The bell tower at Marlay. A clock would have been mounted on the circular portion of the tower and the bell housed in the interior rang out at the end of the working day. It was also used to let farm workers and labourers on the estate know when it was meal time.

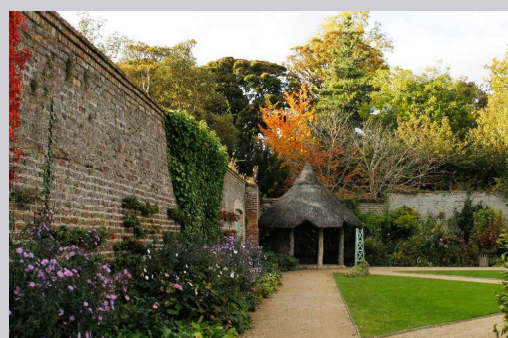


The acquisition of a few hundred acres of former monastic lands by the Taylors, a prominent Dublin family, during the early eighteenth century signalled the beginning of what would later become the Marlay demesne. Thomas Taylor erected the first dwelling house on-site, known as Grange. When the property was offered for sale on thirty acres in 1764, it was purchased by David La Touche, a banker who later served as first director of the Bank of Ireland in 1783. David La Touche married Elizabeth Marlay, daughter of the bishop of Dromore, in 1762. Though they lived primarily in Dublin city, he acquired the Grange estate from the Taylors two years later and renamed it in honour of his bride. David La Touche set about designing the landscape around his property to maximise on its views of the Dublin mountains. He also took an interest in farming and created a model farm on his estate. Successive members of the La Touche family would reside at Marlay for exactly one hundred years until 1864.

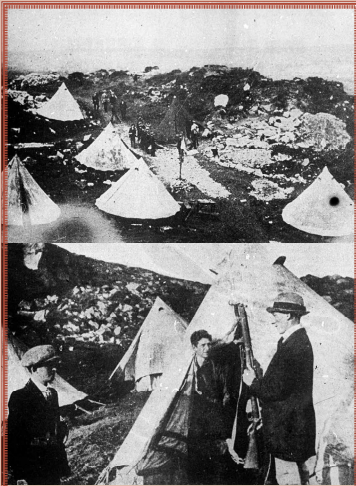


Marlay House, 1955. David La Touche built his big house at Marlay in 1794, thirty years after he first purchased the estate. The house included a large entrance hall, ballroom and an oval music room. There were ten bedrooms upstairs. A portion of the original Grange house was retained to provide kitchens and accommodation for servants (Courtesy Love family).

View of the Regency garden within the walled gardens at Marlay, carefully maintained and managed by a dedicated team today



# THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE



Sixth Battalion camp at Barnacullia, July 1921 (dlr Local Studies).

The Sixth Battalion, Dublin Brigade IRA, formed in south County Dublin in September 1919 to continue the fight for Irish independence, found themselves operating in an area populated by a 'none too friendly people'. The multitude of main roads in the county, as well as two railway lines, allowed British reinforcements easy access to the area and the majority of IRA activity focused on disrupting communications including cutting of telephone wires, digging of trenches, theft of mail and damage to train lines.

Though there was undoubtedly animosity towards the occupants of big houses in the region, the buildings did not have the same resonance as the larger landowning ancestral estates that dominated much of rural Ireland. The villas and mansion houses of the local area changed hands frequently and were located on smaller estates, so land agitation was not a major factor in attacks on big houses. The large estates also provided much employment for local people living in the towns and villages.



Wyckham House, Dundrum, the home of Michael Murphy. The house was the scene of an attempted burning in 1922, reportedly due to a case of mistaken identity.



Glencairn House and stables, Leopardstown, 1908. The owner faced intimidation and threats during the War of Independence, and was ordered to leave the area (dlr Local Studies).



Local big houses, many of which were occupied by former British army officers, became an important source for guns and supplies during the War of Independence. In July 1920, the home of William Henry O'Kelly at Monkstown Castle was visited by masked men searching for arms. In March 1921, Carrigrenane, the home of Capt John Atkinson in Killiney, was raided for arms. Atkinson, a veteran who had been seriously wounded at Gallipoli, opened fire on the raiders and was shot in both hands, losing the use of one. Like many others, he left Ireland shortly thereafter and relocated permanently to England. Glencairn, the Leopardstown home of Boss Croker, was also raided.



Glenvar House, Blackrock, 1921. The house remains a private family home though much of the land surrounding it was developed for housing during the twentieth century (Courtesy UCD Archives).

Many empty big houses were utilised as IRA safehouses and storage for weapons and ammunition. The demesne land surrounding houses was also used for training and drilling practices. During the summer of 1921, the stables at the unoccupied Glencullen House in the Dublin mountains were utilised as a bomb-making factory. Éamon de Valera stayed briefly in a safehouse at Glenvar House on Cross Avenue before he was arrested there in June 1921. Shortly thereafter, a truce was called and he was invited to London to take part in peace talks in Britain.

# MODERN MARLAY

Following the departure of the La Touche family from Marlay in 1864, the house passed through a number of owners before it was purchased by Robert Tedcastle, a successful shipping magnate and coal merchant, who served as a director for the Dublin Steam Packet Company. Three of Tedcastle's grandchildren came to live at Marlay in 1895 and had fond memories of growing up there. Robert Tedcastle died in 1919 at the age of ninety-three, and the house was left empty during the War of Independence and Civil War, and did not come under any attack. By the time the next owner, Robert Love, took possession of the Marlay demesne in 1925, the house was almost completely covered by overgrown shrubs.

Robert and his wife Maud purchased Marlay with the intention of establishing a dairy business on the 300 acre estate. However, the opening of the Hughes brothers' dairy at nearby Hazelbrook Farm in 1926 put an end to these plans. Robert Love decided to go into market gardening instead and five commercial glasshouses were added to the estate to facilitate his new business. Robert sold a portion of Marlay demesne to Grange Golf Club in 1925, allowing them to expand to an eighteen-hole course. Following his death in 1939, his son Philip inherited the Marlay estate. Philip Love continued the market gardening business at Marlay and also bred racehorses, including Larkspur, winner of the Epsom Derby in 1962.

After Philip's death in 1970, the house and estate were put up for sale and purchased by Dublin County Council. The council purchased the Marlay estate to provide a much-needed green space for the rapidly growing suburbs around the demesne but a lack of funds meant that the house, which was declared structurally unsound in 1977, could not be restored and demolition of the property was briefly considered. Fortunately, despite limited finances, restoration work began on the house in 1992 under a FÁS training scheme. Following the creation of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council in 1994, the restoration received further financial support. Over 350 FÁS trainees and craftsmen worked to repair a wide array of problems including dry rot, damp, and ruined plasterwork. The house was formally reopened on 15 September 2000.



Rear of Marlay House, with horses grazing on the lawn, 1955 (Courtesy Love family).



Aerial view of farmyard and commercial glasshouses at Marlay, c. 1955. Three large glasshouses were built roughly where the tennis courts and pitches are located in Marlay Park today. Two others were erected in the walled gardens. While tomatoes were the primary output, the Loves also produced cucumbers (Courtesy Love family).



Copy portrait of Evie Hone by Hilda van Stockum. The stained glass artist lived in accommodation in the courtyard of Marlay until her death in 1955. She used a study at the rear of the property as her studio (Courtesy Aisling McCoy).



Ida Love, née Brooks, wife of Philip Love, dressed as an extra during filming at Marlay, 1955. Mrs Love sold the estate to Dublin County Council in 1972 (Courtesy Love family).



Marlay House, c. 1977. The house had been sold to Dublin County Council in 1972 and left empty. Comprehensive restoration work of the house would not begin until 1992 (Courtesy South Dublin Libraries, Patrick Hely Collection).



# CABINTEELY

## A SOCIAL CLIMBER'S SHOWPIECE



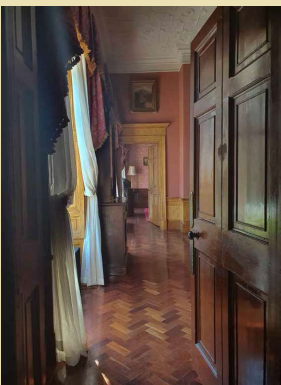
View of the parkland at Cabinteely from inside the house, 2021.



View of Cabinteely House, with modern sculpture on the front lawn, 2021. The single storey wing to the rear of the original house was added by the Pim family during the late nineteenth century (Courtesy John Hickey).



Portrait of Robert Craggs Nugent, later Earl Nugent by Thomas Gainsborough, c. 1761 (Courtesy Holburne Museum, Bath).



Enfilade on the ground floor at Cabinteely.



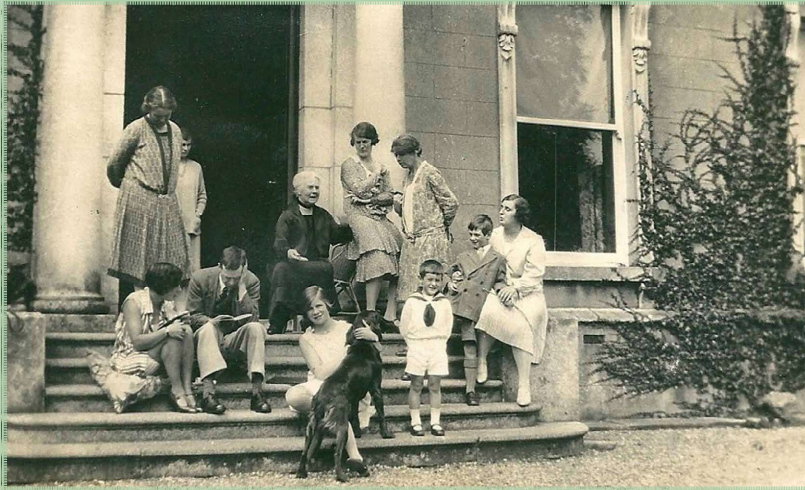
Cabinteely House, 2021. The land on which Robert Nugent built Cabinteely House was leased to him by the Byrne family and reverted to them on his death. In 1741, George Byrne married Clare Nugent, the same Clare who had given birth to Robert's son in 1730. After the birth, Clare had returned to her family in Westmeath, leaving the child to be raised by a Catholic priest in Galway. The 1741 marriage settlement, to which Robert was party, makes it clear that he and Clare Nugent were not cousins, but brother and sister (Courtesy John Hickey).

Cabinteely House, originally called Clare Hill, was built in 1769 with the design attributed to the English architect Thomas Cooley. The big house stands on a raised vantage point close to Cabinteely village in the south-east of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. An 1801 description records it as 'a very large elegant modern house... extensive demesne well planted, improved and beautifully situated, commanding a fine view of the sea and the surrounding country'.

While the building was altered and extended during the nineteenth century, the internal rooms remain largely as originally built. Some key architectural features include a classical sandstone chimneypiece with musical motifs in the entrance hall as well as papier-mâché work and decorative plasterwork. Like most big houses, Cabinteely included farm buildings and outhouses, as well as walled and formal gardens. The demesne, enclosed by high stone walls that remain largely intact today, was landscaped in the natural manner popularised by Capability Brown, the prominent eighteenth century English landscape gardener. This style of landscape design favoured a more natural and pastoral look with belts of trees, large bodies of water, and woodland pathways - all features which are evident in the park today. When the house was built, it lay on thirty-two acres of land. Over the years this was increased to 222 acres, much of which was working farmland until the 1970s.

Cabinteely House was built as a showpiece by Robert Nugent, a politician who had the mansion erected shortly after his acquisition of a noble title, Viscount Clare, in 1767. Born in 1702 into a well-established Westmeath family, Robert lived a colourful life. He spent his early years in Ireland but fled to London in 1730, ostensibly to avoid marrying his cousin, Clare Nugent, by whom he had a son who he never recognised. In England, Robert married wealthy widows and used their money to enter politics and climb the social ladder, prompting Horace Walpole to create a new verb - *to nugentise*, meaning to marry repeatedly for money and social elevation.

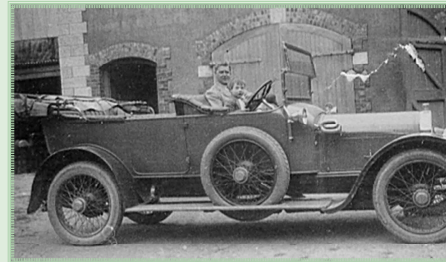
# CABINTEELY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Hollway family group on the front steps at Cabinteely, c. 1921. Mary Hollway is seated and dressed in black (Courtesy Hollway family).



Ardfallen House, Dalkey, c. 1920. The Hollway family lived at Ardfallen before moving to Cabinteely in 1921. Anti-Treaty republicans unsuccessfully attempted to burn Ardfallen in October 1922 during the Civil War (Courtesy Philip Hollway).



John Hollway's motor car at Cabinteely House, c. 1920. The car was missing for three days before it was discovered abandoned near Bray and returned to the family (Courtesy Hollway family).

Cabinteely House remained in the Byrne family until the late nineteenth century when it was sold to the Pims, a Quaker family who lived in nearby Brennanstown House. In 1921, the house and lands were sold to John Hollway, a naval architect and ship builder, and his wife Mary. Prior to purchasing Cabinteely House, the Hollweys had lived at Ardfallen House in Dalkey, but had been looking to buy a larger house with land outside Dublin. They had been warned against this as, in the climate of the War of Independence, isolated country houses were vulnerable to attack. Despite the relative safety of the semi-rural property at Cabinteely, family recollections include stories of Mary Hollway raising her voice to continue conversations at the dinner table while the noise of gunfire rang out from the woods of the estate. In 1922, the Hollway's Wolsey car was taken from the yard at Cabinteely by armed men and later seen being driven towards Dublin city with a machine gun mounted to it.

Cabinteely House was sold to Joseph McGrath in 1933 for £15,000, keeping the entire estate intact. The house continued as a family home, occupied by McGrath, his wife Aileen and their three sons and three daughters. Joe McGrath is most remembered for his success in horse racing and founding the Irish Hospitals Sweepstake, with his involvement in the latter bringing significant wealth to McGrath and his co-founders. However, his involvement in national events associated with the founding of the Irish Free State is lesser known. McGrath saw action at Marrowbone Distillery during the 1916 Rising and was imprisoned on four occasions during the War of Independence, escaping once. He was elected to the first Dáil in 1920 and served as manager and accountant to the Irish delegation in London during the months leading up to the signing of the Treaty on 6 December 1921. McGrath reluctantly supported the Treaty and voted for its ratification in January 1922.

Cabinteely House flourished as a happy family home during the McGrath tenure. Following the death of McGrath in 1966, the house was closed up and used rarely. While some of the Cabinteely lands were developed as housing, eighty acres of land immediately surrounding the house was transferred to the County Council for use as a public green space; this was opened as Cabinteely Park in 1982.



Joe McGrath and Michael Collins at a pro-Treaty rally in College Green, Dublin, March 1922 (dlr Local Studies).



Photograph of Cabinteely House, c. 1921. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council assumed ownership of Cabinteely House and grounds in 1994. Since passing into public ownership, the house and grounds have been used for music events, fashion shoots and filming. Cabinteely House was carefully restored and is managed and maintained by a dedicated staff today (Courtesy Hollway family).



In addition to his business responsibilities, John Hollway oversaw the running of a mixed farm at Cabinteely. The threshing machine is seen here at the front of the house, c. 1921 (Courtesy Hollway family).



McGrath family portrait in the upstairs drawing room at Cabinteely House, c. 1940 (Courtesy McGrath family).

# FERNHILL

## FORTUNES IN STONE

Fernhill House is located on a high point in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, in the foothills of Three Rock Mountain close to Stepside. The property, consisting of over one hundred acres, was acquired from the Verner family by Frederick Darley in 1815. The Verners held lands in the Stepside area from 1749 and the Darleys acted as their land agents in Dublin. Frederick Darley belonged to the third generation of a family deeply involved in the building trade in Dublin, though their involvement in quarrying and construction in the north of Ireland goes back at least as far as the 1660s. It is likely that the Darley family had interests in quarries on the hillside above Fernhill, in Barnacullia or Ballyedmonduff, and this may be what brought Frederick Darley to the area.

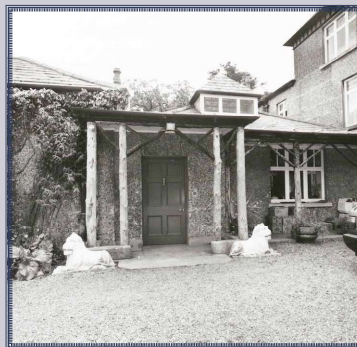
Though there were buildings at Fernhill when he purchased the property, Frederick Darley chose a different site further to the east to construct his house, a simple single storey building. The location, on a high point in the lands, ensured that it had magnificent views over Dublin Bay and Howth, with Killiney and Dalkey hills off to the right as well as views over Killiney Bay. The house was built as a country retreat for Darley and his wife Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Arthur Guinness, founder of the famous brewery. Elizabeth gave birth to twenty children, twelve of whom survived to adulthood. While the family lived primarily in Dublin, Fernhill provided a mountain escape from the densely populated and smoky city.



Fernhill House and gardens (Courtesy Peter Cavanagh).



Aerial view of Fernhill House, c. 1950 (Courtesy Nicholas Ryan).



The front door at Fernhill, with rustic porch supported by wooden posts, c. 1990 (Courtesy Irish Architectural Archive).



Fernhill House by Mrs Grattan Guinness, c. 1845. This watercolour shows the first house built at Fernhill by the Darleys, a single storey house with a porch outside the front door in the middle of the north-eastern side of the house, flanked by windows and with two windows in the south-eastern elevation. The kitchen was located at the rear (Courtesy Robert Walker).

The Darleys developed the estate surrounding the house, leaving the slopes to the front of the property as open parkland with some trees planted to frame the views. Trees were also planted around the periphery of the property with denser woodland to the rear, where it gave shelter from the westerly winds. In the northern part of the grounds, the kitchen garden had been laid out with a number of farm buildings occupying the site of the two yards that exist today. Beyond the ornamental and kitchen gardens, the property included fields that were farmed to provide fresh produce for the family.



A chauffeur with cars in the stableyard at Fernhill, c. 1910 (Courtesy Edward Rutherford).



Aerial view of Fernhill House in the snow. The original building, constructed by Frederick Darley after he purchased the property, is visible with later additions behind it (Courtesy Nicholas Ryan).

# FERNHILL

## CULTIVATING THE GARDEN

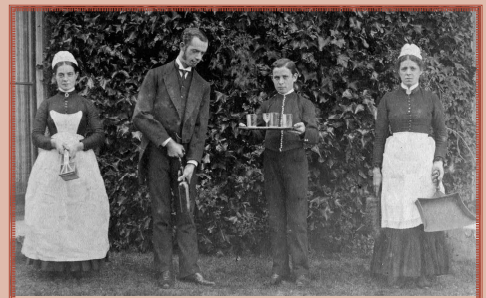
Fernhill was occupied by William Darley from the 1850s. He made significant developments in the gardens, laying out the Broadwalk and planting it with specimen trees including four giant redwoods. This pathway, a distinct feature of Fernhill that survives today, was intended as a place for leisurely walking.



William F. Darley and his wife, Maria, in the gardens at Fernhill, c. 1885 (Courtesy Edward Rutherford).



A gardener at work on the Broadwalk, Fernhill, c. 1885 (Courtesy Edward Rutherford).



Servants at Fernhill, c. 1890 (Courtesy Edward Rutherford).

In 1860, as work progressed on the construction of the Broadwalk, William Darley found himself in legal trouble after locals complained that he was interfering with a public road. He was back in court in 1861, this time taking action against a local man who had been trespassing and backfilling the tunnel beneath the Broadwalk. William Darley argued that no proof had been offered as to the existence of a right of way and the court agreed, freeing the way for the tunnel to be retained. With Fernhill in public ownership today, every visitor to the estate can walk both the Broadwalk and the Public Right of Way which runs underneath it.

Mabel Darley, a staunch unionist, was resident in Fernhill during the revolutionary period. She is credited with preventing an arson attack on the house, having locked doors and windows and refusing to vacate the property when a group of armed men attempted to burn it in 1921. A trench was dug across the avenue at Fernhill on another occasion, and Mabel waited patiently in the car while her chauffeur went to fetch planks so they could drive over it.



Mabel and Eva Darley, c. 1910 (Courtesy Xandra Bingley).



Membership card for the Dublin Women's Unionist Club, 1910 (Courtesy Xandra Bingley).

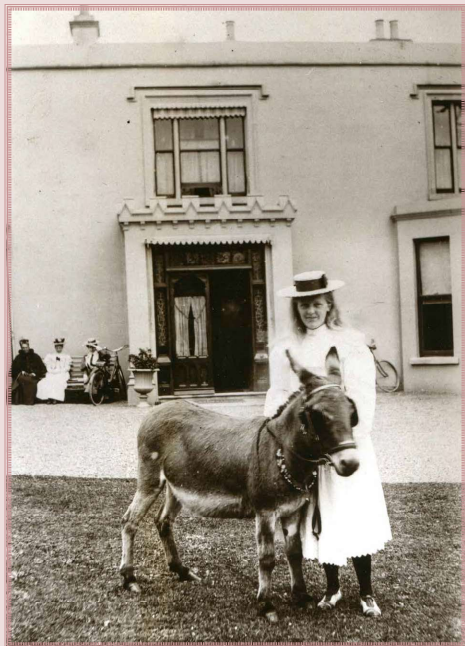
Fernhill was purchased by the Walker family in 1934 and they maintained and developed the gardens during their time there. Sally Walker, the last private owner of the house, opened the gardens to the public and hosted outdoor sculpture exhibitions in the grounds. Fernhill was sold to a private developer in 2007. The property crash occurred not long after this and the Fernhill estate was taken over by NAMA. In 2014, Fernhill was acquired by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council for use as a public park. Since then, dlr Parks have laid out new paths, walls and entrances, restored the Broadwalk and Right of Way, and developed running tracks, pitches and play landscapes for the continuously growing population in the Sandycove, Stepside and Kiltarnan areas.



Sally Walker showing President Mary Robinson the gardens at Fernhill during the Sculpture in Context programme, 1991 (Courtesy Ann Walker).

# AIRFIELD

## A WOMAN'S WORLD



A young Letitia Overend with a donkey on the lawn in front of Airfield House, the Overend country estate in Dundrum, c. 1895 (Courtesy Airfield Estate).



Lily, Letitia, and Naomi Overend with soldiers in uniform, on the lawn at Airfield, c. 1914 (Courtesy OMARC, PP/AIR/3139).

Airfield House is located on the Upper Kilmacud Road, on a hill above Dundrum in the north-west of the county. The property, originally known as Bess Mount and sitting on eight acres, was purchased by Trevor and Lily Overend for their young family in 1894. The elegant country house was sold to the Overends by the Jury family, who owned the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin city. The gardens at Airfield had been previously used to provide fresh produce in the hotel kitchens.

The house and small farm was acquired as a country retreat for the Overend family and they retained their Dublin townhouse in Ely Place as a winter residence. Lily Overend and her teenage daughter, Letitia, immediately took to farming on a small scale, producing eggs, milk and butter. However, the family's arrival at Airfield was overshadowed by the death of baby Constance Overend in September 1895, only a few days before her first birthday. In 1900, Lily gave birth to another daughter, Naomi.



View of the walled garden at Airfield, with the Dublin Mountains in the distance, 2001 (Courtesy RTE Archives).



Trevor and Naomi Overend in the greenhouse at Airfield, c. 1901 (Courtesy Airfield Estate).



Lily Overend with one of her prize-winning Jersey cows at Airfield, c. 1907 (Courtesy OMARC, PP/AIR/1008).

Lily was the driving force behind the farm at Airfield, building up the famous Dromartin Jersey Herd and supplying produce to local creameries and traders. It was Lily who instilled in her daughters a sense of duty and charity, and from an early age, the sisters were encouraged to raise money for children less fortunate than themselves. In 1909, Lily helped found a special branch of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children called 'The Children's League of Pity in Dundrum'. Naomi was encouraged to contribute to this cause when, at age eight, she hosted her first garden party at Airfield – a fancy dress event where children paid to attend and take part in the various activities.

Charitable activity, informed by religious belief, was perceived as an essential duty of middle and upper-class women but the Overend sisters were exemplary in their commitment to others. During World War One, Letitia was a central member of the Alexandra College Branch of the St John Ambulance Brigade. She also worked as a first aider during the 1916 Rising where casualties on both sides were treated without distinction. Throughout their entire lives, the Overend sisters donated time and money to many charitable causes.

# AIRFIELD

## AN ENDURING LEGACY

Following Trevor Overend's death in 1919, his will ensured that his widow and daughters would be financially independent. He organised for the sale of his solicitor's practice so the proceeds could go to Lily's upkeep during widowhood. Neither of Trevor's daughters married, but their wealth ensured that they were freed from the dependency experienced by many unmarried women. The sisters were imbued with the independent spirit and self-assurance of their position in society. Without husband or children, they moved with confidence through the world as philanthropists, businesswomen, international travellers, and early enthusiastic motorists. Letitia bought a Rolls Royce in 1927, and the distinctive vehicle, with one of the sisters behind the wheel, became a familiar sight on the roads in the local area – it can still be seen at Airfield today.



Letitia and Naomi Overend with their Rolls Royce at Airfield, c. 1969 (Courtesy OMARC, PP/AIR/321).



Naomi Overend with her Austin Sixteen at Airfield, c. 1969 (Courtesy Airfield Estate).



The gates and lodge to Airfield House, c. 1975 (Courtesy Irish Architectural Archive, Kevin Harrington Collection).

There are no recorded incidents of republicans targeting Airfield House during the revolutionary period. However, two bullets dating from the era were discovered lodged in a tree on the grounds of the house in 2009. The bullets were fired from the direction of the railway line below the estate, directly in line of the house, and suggest that someone who was about to damage the line was spotted and fired upon.



Naomi Overend enjoying the gardens in Airfield at different stages of her life (Courtesy Airfield Estate).

Both Letitia and Naomi inherited considerable personal wealth, and over their lifetimes bought up land in the locality to increase the acreage at Airfield to thirty-eight acres from the original eight their father had purchased. The Overend sisters had no direct heirs; instead of allowing their house and lands to be broken up or sold to developers, they founded a charitable trust in the 1970s to keep the property intact for the benefit of the people of Dublin. Letitia died in 1974, and Naomi in 1993.

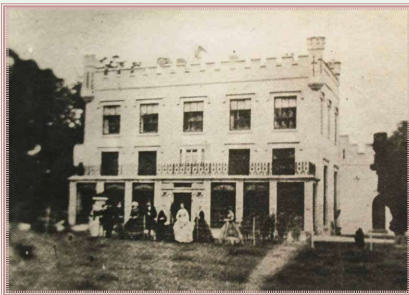
The Airfield Estate is open to members of the public today and tours of the house are just one feature on the site, which includes a café and garden shop. The estate is a unique legacy in south County Dublin, one where women were firmly in the driving seat. The formidable Overend sisters of Airfield demonstrate that women, when given the opportunity, could wield great influence from their bases in the big houses of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown.



Airfield House, 1990s (Courtesy Airfield Estate).

# BIG HOUSES AS RELIGIOUS HOUSES

The destruction of big houses throughout Ireland during the revolutionary period was generally provoked by resentment towards English absentee landlords, though Terence Dooley's work has shown the reasons for burnings were varied, including reprisals for British military activity and to prevent the buildings from being used as garrisons. The attacks on these properties also reflected the targeting of a Protestant landowning class. However, the big houses that had been purchased by Catholic orders of nuns, priests, and brothers during the nineteenth century survived physical attack by social and political revolutionaries. Some religious houses, like Stillorgan Castle, operated as a hospital by the St John of God Brothers, were suspected of harbouring republicans and raided by the British authorities.



Stillorgan Castle, acquired by the St John of God Brothers, who came to Ireland from France during the 1870s. Known locally as Mount Eagle due to three stone eagle statues on the roof, the eighteenth century house was purchased from David Sherlock MP in 1882 and enlarged for use as a hospital (Courtesy St John of God Brothers).



Religious institutes came into possession of large tracts of land in the Blackrock area during the nineteenth century. Blackrock College was established at Castle Dawson by the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1860. They purchased nearby Williamstown Castle on six acres in 1875. Willow Park (pictured) with over twenty acres, was purchased from the Bewley family in 1924 and a preparatory school for young boys was opened (Courtesy Blackrock College Archives).



Clareville, on Cross Avenue, Blackrock, 1980s. A portion of the building was used by republicans for censoring stolen mail during the War of Independence, while another section was inhabited by aged and retired priests from Blackrock College. During his short time spent in hiding at Glenvar House across the road, Éamon de Valera would attend mass in the house. The house was demolished in 1988 (Courtesy Blackrock College Archives).

As religious orders expanded following Catholic emancipation in 1829, they needed suitable premises for accommodation and ministry work. Some orders acquired substantial properties due to a rise in the numbers of Irish men and women entering religious life at that time. The large estates that dotted the landscape of the area south of Dublin city provided the space required, not only for current members of the religious congregations, but also for the novitiate and seminary buildings that were required to train new recruits. Most importantly, the big house and its surrounding land allowed for expansion as many religious orders established boarding and day schools. Some orders wanted space to open free schools for poor children living in the locality. Religious orders that were involved in healthcare also needed large premises to adapt for use as asylums, convalescent homes, and hospitals.



The Sisters of Mercy, who had briefly established a convent at Ballygishen House in Sandycove during the 1860s, took over Carysfort House in 1891 and ran Carysfort Teacher Training College there until its closure in 1988. Carysfort House now forms part of the UCD Smurfit School (dlr Local Studies).



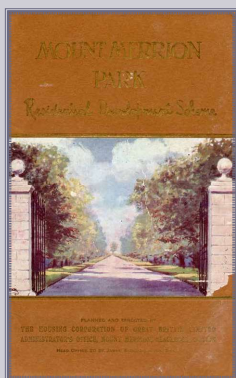
Mount Anville House is another convent that is well known in the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown area. Mount Anville was home to William Dargan before it was purchased for use as a convent by the Society of the Sacred Heart in 1865. First built c. 1795, it appears on Taylor's map of County Dublin (1816) as Anville House. The Italianate villa-style house stood on the Roebuck estate of Lord Trimleston and enjoyed expansive views of the mountains and the sea (Courtesy Provincial Archives, Irish-Scottish Province, Society of the Sacred Heart)



The entrance hall at Temple Hill, Blackrock, converted for use as a chapel, c.1980. The Sisters of Charity oversaw a Mother and Baby Home at Temple Hill until 1985 (Courtesy Peter Pearson).

# NEW USES FOR OLD HOUSES

While the big houses of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown did not face the same level of destruction and intimidation that other big houses in Ireland experienced during the revolutionary years, a way of life slowly came to an end during the twentieth century. The great Mount Merrion estate was sold and developed as a garden suburb for families from the 1920s.



Brochure for the new Mount Merrion housing estate, 1928. The gate piers were later moved to Willow Park School in Blackrock (Courtesy John Holohan).

Many other big houses survived at the expense of selling land off piecemeal in order to keep unprofitable estates going. Other owners utilised their land as commercial nurseries, dairy farms and riding schools. Other uses were found for the big houses of the county and many survived as religious institutions, hospitals, hotels, embassies, and schools.

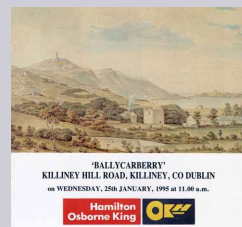
As demand for housing in Dublin increased and the suburb expanded, builders tended to demolish formerly private domains into modern housing estates. Likewise, the widening of roads and creation of the M50 motorway saw change in the landscape as demesne walls, gate lodges and heritage trees were removed. Where houses did survive, they were often converted into flats or entirely removed from their original context with unsympathetic alterations and additions. When the development value of land is high, it's worth as a public amenity is undervalued and the pressure for housing in an ever-growing region takes precedence.

The widespread indignation that followed the destruction of Frescati in 1983 led to the preservation of other historic properties in the area, most notably St Helen's in Booterstown which was declared a National Monument in 1994. Through the introduction of 'listed buildings' during the 1980s and a more widespread interest on the part of owners in their old properties, this part of our cultural heritage is, in general, in a good state.

As some of the earliest and grandest surviving buildings in the county, the big houses of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown straddle the line between past and present, and offer a tantalising vision of what life was once like in the county.



Aerial image taken for the sale of Newtownpark House, Blackrock, 1984. Much of the estate was sold off for housing during the twentieth century. The house is used as a nursing home today (dlr Local Studies).



Sales catalogue for Ballycarberry, formerly known as Merton Lodge, showing painting with view towards Killiney and Dalkey from Shankill by William Westall. Auction catalogues can provide invaluable information about grand houses long after the contents have been dispersed (dlr Local Studies)



The cut-stone Georgian doorway at Moreen House, Dundrum, c. 1970. The house was purchased by the Central Bank and subsequently demolished (Courtesy South Dublin Libraries, Patrick Healy Collection).



Frescati House, boarded up and awaiting demolition in Blackrock, 1982 (Courtesy RTÉ Archives).



Sketch of Shangnanagh Castle. The property, used as a prison for much of the twentieth century, is currently boarded up and awaiting development (Courtesy Irish Architectural Archive).