

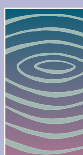


# RUSSBOROUGH COUNTY WICKLOW

## CONSERVATION PLAN

The Integrated Conservation Group for The Heritage Council and The Alfred Beit Foundation

AN  
CHOMHAIRLE  
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THE  
HERITAGE  
COUNCIL

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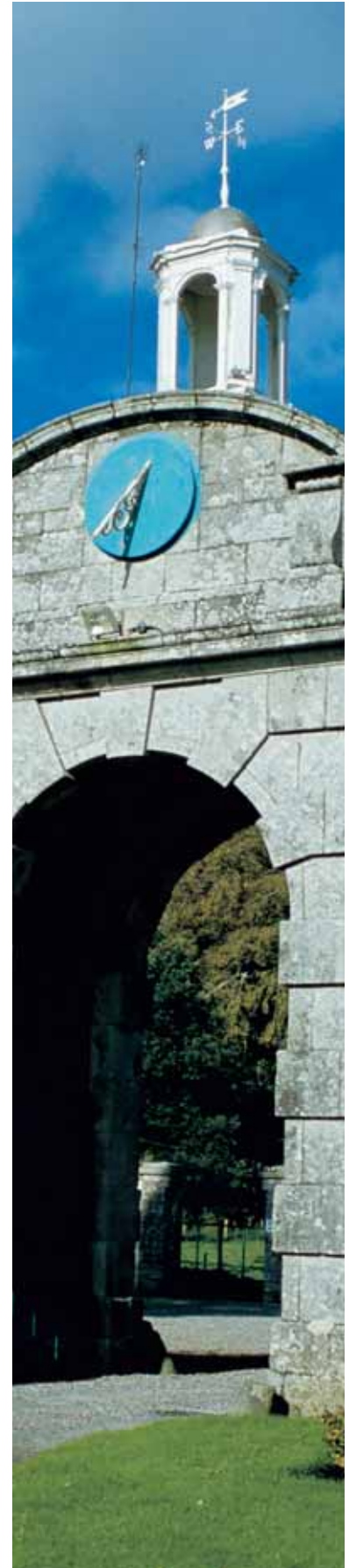
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APPENDIX V: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COLLECTIONS (STATEMENT BY ANDREW O'CONNOR, NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND)

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Lady Beit

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Dermot Rice, Architect

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Dr Susan Hood, Representative Church Body (RCB) Library

Staff of the National Gallery of Ireland

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The role of architect Austin Dunphy in the care and conservation of Russborough for many years is recognised and appreciated.

## FOREWORD

Russborough, County Wicklow — with its internationally famous collection of paintings bequeathed to the Irish nation by Sir Alfred and Lady Beit— is both a gift and a treasure of incomparable value. It is a gift thanks to the generosity of the Beit family. In 1976, the late Sir Alfred Beit established a Trust enabling the people of Ireland to enjoy the house, demesne and its wonderful collection in perpetuity. That it is a treasure has always been recognised. The extent of its value has now been established beyond doubt by the publication of this Conservation Plan which describes the significance not only of the house and its collections, but also of the hitherto little recognised remains of the 18th-century designed landscape.

In reinforcing the understanding of Russborough's significance, the Conservation Plan provides a framework and a vision for Russborough in the future. It is a strong indication of the Heritage Council's support for and commitment to Russborough, a recognition of the value of the bequest to Ireland's cultural heritage.



Dr Tom O'Dwyer  
Chairperson  
The Heritage Council



Michael Starrett  
Chief Executive  
The Heritage Council



# 1. SUMMARY

## 1.1 THE BACKGROUND

### RUSSBOROUGH

Mark Bence-Jones (1978) described Russborough as ‘arguably the most beautiful house in Ireland’ — and there are few who would disagree, given the perfection of its architectural form and the quality of its interiors. Add to this the integrity of the estate, the importance of the designed landscape, its setting on the western side of the Wicklow Hills, and the association with the Leeson and Beit families who created two of the most significant collections of art in Ireland, and it is immediately clear that Russborough is a very important historic place.



Plate 1: A view of Russborough

### THE ALFRED BEIT FOUNDATION

Today, Russborough is largely under the ownership and management of the Alfred Beit Foundation. Established by Sir Alfred Beit in 1976, the Foundation is run by a Board of Trustees known as the Committee of Management, with the object of keeping the house and collections intact and open to the public. Sir Alfred’s widow, Lady Beit, remains in residence in the West Pavilion and the West Courtyard buildings.

The house is managed by Deirdre Rowsome, with assistance from grounds and maintenance staff and visitor guides.

### THREATS

For the past number of years, the Board of Trustees has been finding that running and repair costs are increasing and that visitor income is not sufficient to cover

these on an annual basis. A comprehensive survey of the building, commissioned in 1995, highlighted significant and expensive items of repair that needed attention. In addition, there were increasing concerns about security issues and the environmental controls which are needed to safeguard the collections.

## THE HERITAGE COUNCIL

The Heritage Council was established on a statutory basis with a responsibility for proposing policies and priorities for the national heritage, both built and natural. The Alfred Beit Foundation approached the Heritage Council for financial support in re-roofing the main building, one of the most serious defects identified in the 1995 Survey. In line with their policy, the Heritage Council offered support for the preparation of this Conservation Plan as a first step towards addressing the problems encountered by the Foundation.

### 1.2 THE CONSERVATION PLAN

This Conservation Plan is the outcome of an integrated study of Russborough carried out by a team of conservation architects, archaeologists, structural and services engineers, building material consultants and landscape architects, with specialist advice on the care of the art collections. It addresses the following:

- Understanding the place
- The cultural significance of the place
- Identifying issues which may affect that significance
- Writing policies to address the issues
- Building in mechanisms for implementation and review

## UNDERSTANDING

The Plan includes a detailed study of Russborough today which, together with a record of the history and development of the site, leads to a comprehensive *Understanding* of its component parts and their contribution to the integrity of the whole.

## SIGNIFICANCE

This *Understanding* leads to a *Statement of the Significance* of Russborough based on:

- The integrity of the estate
- The architectural qualities of the house
- The relationship between the house and the Milltown and Beit Collections
- The designed Palladian landscape and its relationship to the house
- The wildlife habitats
- The importance of the estate as a visitor attraction

When all of these have been considered, it becomes clear that Russborough is a place of major national and international significance in terms of cultural, architectural and historical interest.

## ISSUES

The study also identified many *Issues* concerning both the short- and long-term retention of this *Significance*:

- Threats to the integrity of the estate
- Physical defects or potential defects that affect the building fabric
- Issues of safety and security for the buildings, collections, visitors and occupants
- Issues relating to the management and conservation of the landscape
- Availability and management of resources

## POLICIES

*Policies* for the protection, conservation and enhancement of Russborough have been devised to ensure the retention of the integrity of the estate while at the same time developing the commercial potential which provides for a sustainable future.

## IMPLEMENTATION

*Implementation* of these policies will require substantial investment; the Alfred Beit Foundation will require support from appropriate sources. This support is likely to be dependent on an economic appraisal/business plan that will refine these proposals within an economic context, thus creating a sustainable future for Russborough. It is recommended that such an economic appraisal be commissioned as soon as practical.

### 1.3 PARTICIPANTS

#### THE STEERING GROUP

The Steering Group established by the Alfred Beit Foundation and the Heritage Council to manage the process included:

Mary Hanna, The Heritage Council

William Finlay, The Alfred Beit Foundation

Patricia Oliver, The Alfred Beit Foundation

Marcus Beresford, The Alfred Beit Foundation

Deirdre Rowsome, The Alfred Beit Foundation

The Steering Group prepared a Brief for the preparation of the Conservation Plan.

#### THE INTEGRATED CONSERVATION GROUP

Following a selection process, the Integrated Conservation Group were appointed to carry out the study. The team members were:

Consarc Conservation, Architects — Dawson Stelfox, Roisin Donnelly

Carrig, Building Material Specialists — Peter Cox, Emma Clarke

Margaret Gowen and Company, Archaeologists — Margaret Gowen, Eileen O'Reilly

Lisa Edden, Structural Engineer — Lisa Edden

Buro Happold, Services Engineers — Edith Blennerhassett

Nicholas Pearson Associates, Landscape Architects — Simon Bonvoisin, Claire Houston

Andrew O'Connor of the National Gallery of Ireland advised the Group on the Collections.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING RUSSBOROUGH

### 2.1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The history of Russborough is primarily associated with the building of the great house, the focal point of the demesne, by Joseph Leeson in the early 18th century. However, some insights into the history of the lands prior to this can be gleaned from historical research.

#### TOWNLAND NAMES

Various primary sources point to changes in the townland name in this area. The names 'Balluilaccuane' and 'Bali Ulachtuain' are referred to in *Archbishop Alen's Register* (McNeill, 1950) and in the *Crede Mihi* as being next to the townland 'Baliudali' (i.e. Ballydallagh), which adjoins Russborough today. 'Baliulachna' is referred to in both the above sources; as late as 1530, 'Balylaghnan' is referred to in *Archbishop Alen's Register* (McNeill, 1950). In this particular reference, Alen notes that Balylaghnan, which is part of those lands claimed by the Earl of Kildare 'in right of the Lords Butler', is called 'Thomas Russell's land'. This is significant, as the name 'Russelltowne' begins to appear in the historical record and Balylaghnan disappears (Price, 1953). The meaning of Balylaghnan appears to be 'town of the small lake', although 'baile' can mean something as small as 'homestead'. In the 1970s, a circular crop mark (SMR 10:01) approximately 35m in diameter was noted on aerial photographs (GSIAP, N332-4) located just north of the ornamental lake, north-west of the house (Grogan and Kilfeather, 1998). This may be a destroyed ringfort and may confirm the presence of pre 18th-century habitation on these lands (Appendix 1).

The name Russelltown, although not in use until the mid 16th century, probably took its name from one of the Russells who are mentioned in primary sources relating to this district from the 13th century onwards. For example, a Thomas Russelle was a witness to a grant by Archbishop Luke (McNeill, 1950); Thomas and Stephen Russell were jurors in 1276 (Sweetman & Handcock, 1857-86). The name, in various forms, is then constantly referred to in documents relating to this area. The *Calendar of Fiants* mentions 'Russelleiston' in 1541, 'Russelliston' in 1569, and 'Russelston' in 1582 and 1583 (Price, 1953). It is shown on the Down Survey Barony Map of 1655-9 as 'Russellstowne' (Figure 1).

In 1741, Joseph Leeson purchased lands in Russelltown from a John Graydon and built a country mansion there which he called Russborough. The name was possibly a play on the Latin word 'Rus', suggested by the name Russelltown, and was intended to mean something like 'estate in the country' (Price, 1953). However, the name 'Russborough' does not appear on any maps as an actual townland name until Jacob Nevill's map of County Wicklow, 1760. On Noble and Keenan's map of 1752 (Figure 2), the estate is simply described as 'Leeson's Esq'. John Rocque's map of 1760, however, still used the name 'Russels Town'. It would appear that it was only after this time that the demesne name of Russborough became a townland name (Figure 4).

It is difficult to be precise about dates for the building of the house as there is no documentation of any kind (Cornforth, 1963). Some sort of residence



probably existed on the site, to be demolished by Leeson who erected the present house in its place (Fitzgerald, 1913). A contemporary reference to the house was published in *A Tour of Two Country Gentlemen* (1748) which stated that Russborough was a ‘...new and noble house forming into perfection’.

Russborough was one of the first houses in Ireland in which West Indian (Cuban) mahogany was used internally. It was regularly used as ballast in ships coming from the West Indies and was subsequently sold cheaply in Dublin. It quickly became popular as a replacement wood for native timber in the manufacture of furniture and panelling (Fitzgerald, 1937).

Russborough is the only house of its period in this part of Wicklow. It is certainly unique in the area for its architectural design. Other houses of note in the locality include Blessington (Downshire) House in Blessington village, Baltiboys House and Tulfarris House. Blessington House, now demolished, was the oldest house in the district. Built in 1673, it was the seat of Archbishop Boyle of Armagh. The house was two storeyed, with a dormered attic in its high-pitched roof, and was based on an H-plan. It was considered to be one of the largest country residences of its time and had remarkable formally laid out grounds, pre-dating Russborough by as much as 50 years. Many of the features of this garden still survive in relic form today; Blessington Demesne is considered an important archaeological landscape on this basis.

Both Tulfarris House and Baltiboys House were built in the late 18th century and are remarkably similar in design, both having a five-bay front with centre-breaking forward and a pedimented porch. Both also have Wyatt windows, though in different locations in their façades (Bence-Jones, 1978).

Clearly, Russborough stands out in the Blessington area in terms of its size, design and national significance. Together with the remains preserved at Blessington Demesne and the many tower houses that survive from the medieval period in the area (Three Castles, Burgage More), it forms part of a considerable historical nexus.



Plate 2: The Central Block with colonnades to left and right

## HISTORICAL REFERENCES

Russborough was commented upon by some early travellers or 'tourists', including Bishop Pococke. During a tour in July of 1753 which took in much of West Wicklow, Kildare, Laois and Tipperary, he passed Blessington House and Russborough on his way to Baltinglass (McVeigh, 1995).

*'...then coming in between the mountains came by Blessington, a village where Lord Blessington has a seat, & turning to the south I crossed King's River at Burgage where there is a remarkable old stone cross about fifteen feet high of one piece of mountain Stone; Passing by Mr Leeson's fine new built house and offices I came to the Liffy, which we cross'd over Horspeth bridge...'*

Some grand tourists of the late 18th and early 19th centuries made a point of visiting Russborough and its demesne. Most seem to have concentrated their comments on the waterfall at Poul-a-Phouca than on the grounds themselves, although there are oblique references to a variety of garden features. In Bowden's *Tour Through Ireland* (1791), he notes that the Earl of Milltown's seat

*'...is most beautifully situated... The apartments are superb and extensive, and very elegantly furnished... Pool-a-phouca is on this nobleman's estate, about 2 or 3 miles distant from his seat and a very awful waterfall, formed by the Liffey near its source in the Wicklow Mountains. A melancholy accident happened here a few months ago... In justice, however, for the noble proprietor, he has spared no expense in forming walks and pailings in the most dangerous passages. Here also are moss-houses, caves and grottoes in fine preservation.'*

A 'Moss House', shown on the Russborough estate map (not reproduced), is thought to date to the late 18th/early 19th century. In the early part of the 19th century, a bridge designed by Alexander Nimmo was built across the waterfall chasm. It included an elegant pointed arch with flanking crenellated turrets adorned with blind window openings and loopholes (Howley, 1993). The bridge is described by J. Stirling-Coyne in Bartlett's *The Scenery and Antiquities of Ireland* (1842) but little is added by way of description of the demesne. In 1832, G.N. Wright's *Ireland Illustrated in a series of views...* etc. refers to the dell into which the river descends as a favourite scene of summer festivities:

*'Grottoes, banqueting-rooms, rustic seats and moss houses are scattered through the woods that shade the right side of the glen and witness many morns and eves of mirth and revelry... On one side of the Waterfall Glen is the property of the Earl of Milltown, and the other that of Colonel Wolfe.'*

Mr and Mrs Hall (1841-43) also mentioned Lord Milltown's grounds, which are described as being laid out in good taste and from where the falls could be seen to good advantage. Mrs Hall also noted that the grounds included:

*'...covered seats, cool walks, grottoes, a ballroom, which "in the season" is much frequented by "sod parties", at which we are informed a dance is no infrequent termination to a pic-nic...'*

However, not every contemporary writer approved of Russborough and, more especially, the Milltowns themselves. While in India, Elizabeth Smith, a Scotswoman, married a Colonel Smith, inheritor of the decaying estate of

Baltiboy, near Blessington. The Smiths were not big landlords like their neighbours, the Downshires of Blessington or the Milltowns. In 1829, their estate was valued at £1,200 a year (Sommerville-Large, 1995). Mrs Smith disapproved of Lord Milltown's extravagant spending and commented on his ever-increasing debts:

*'A bad education and disreputable society and an ill-assorted marriage have altogether made him to be shunned instead of courted'.*

She described Russborough as '...that Cathedral of a house' and stated that Lady Milltown '...has no pleasure in it but to see it now and then dusted...'. She went on to comment about houses such as Russborough and Powerscourt:

*'Satin dresses, satin shoes, scents and ceremonies belong to these courtly rooms, the toys of the child and the occupation of a rational being would be equally out of place here.'*

After the Great Famine of the 1840s, many landlords went bankrupt. As there were no rents to receive, there was no money to pay off loans and interest. In October 1847, an Act was passed allowing those who had claims against landlords to petition to have an estate sold in the Court of Encumbered Estates. Although Mrs Smith describes Lord Milltown as 'going to the wall', no records for Russborough exist in the Encumbered Estates Court reports in the National Archive. It would appear that he settled his debts by selling off personal assets. Mrs Smith noted:

*'Lord Milltown had to sell his plate and precious horses... Each was brought out by its attendant groom and paraded before a very small crowd of buyers.'*

Horses were seen as an unjustified extravagance in these times.

## THE SETTING

The overall setting of the house plays an important role in the impression which it creates for the visitor. It is sited on a raised embankment, partly augmented by clay from the opening of lakes and ponds and the construction of terraces in the 1740s and 1750s. There is some indication from place-name evidence that a small lake may have existed here prior to the building of the house (Price, 1953); this lake may have been enhanced as part of the landscape design.



Plate 3: The lakes viewed from the main house

The construction of the terraces and the large ornamental lake north of the house were significant feats of engineering, reputedly costing £30,000 at the time (O'Reilly, 1998). A small island exists in the middle of this lake and it is possible that this was designed to take a small obelisk. The ramped and turfed terraces, enclosed to the north by a semi-circle of trees, may have been designed to accommodate temples, follies and other classical features so typical of Palladian style (Beit, 1978).

Six levels of terracing are still discernible today but it is not entirely clear if they were ever fully completed. No contemporary painting shows the terracing in its final form, nor are there any contemporary references to it.



Plate 4: Cattle graze on old terraces

The terracing at Powerscourt, in this case forming an amphitheatre in front of the house, was apparently relatively unadorned until the mid 19th century (Bence-Jones, 1978); perhaps this was also the case at Russborough. It is the opinion of a number of writers that the terracing is a skeleton of a vast classical garden that was never completed (Bence-Jones, 1978; and Delemonte, 1960).

Ornamental planting, intended to beautify the approaches and immediate surroundings of the house, was a feature of the Irish country mansion from the late 17th century onwards. This was due in part to the passing of the Timber Act (Ireland) 1698, with similar, subsequent Acts passed in 1705 and 1710. As a consequence of the waste of timber that had followed the rebellions of the previous century, it was made compulsory for everyone who owned or tilled land worth more than £10 to plant ten trees every year in order to recover the timber of Ireland (Fitzgerald, 1937). It was usual for much of the timber planted by the richer landlords to include many varieties of ornamental trees and shrubs.

## CARTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

The maps and accompanying text on pages 18-31 provide a cartographic record of Russborough from the 1650s until the early 20th century.

Figure 1: Down Survey Map of the Barony of Talbotstown, County Wicklow (c. 1656), showing Russelstowne

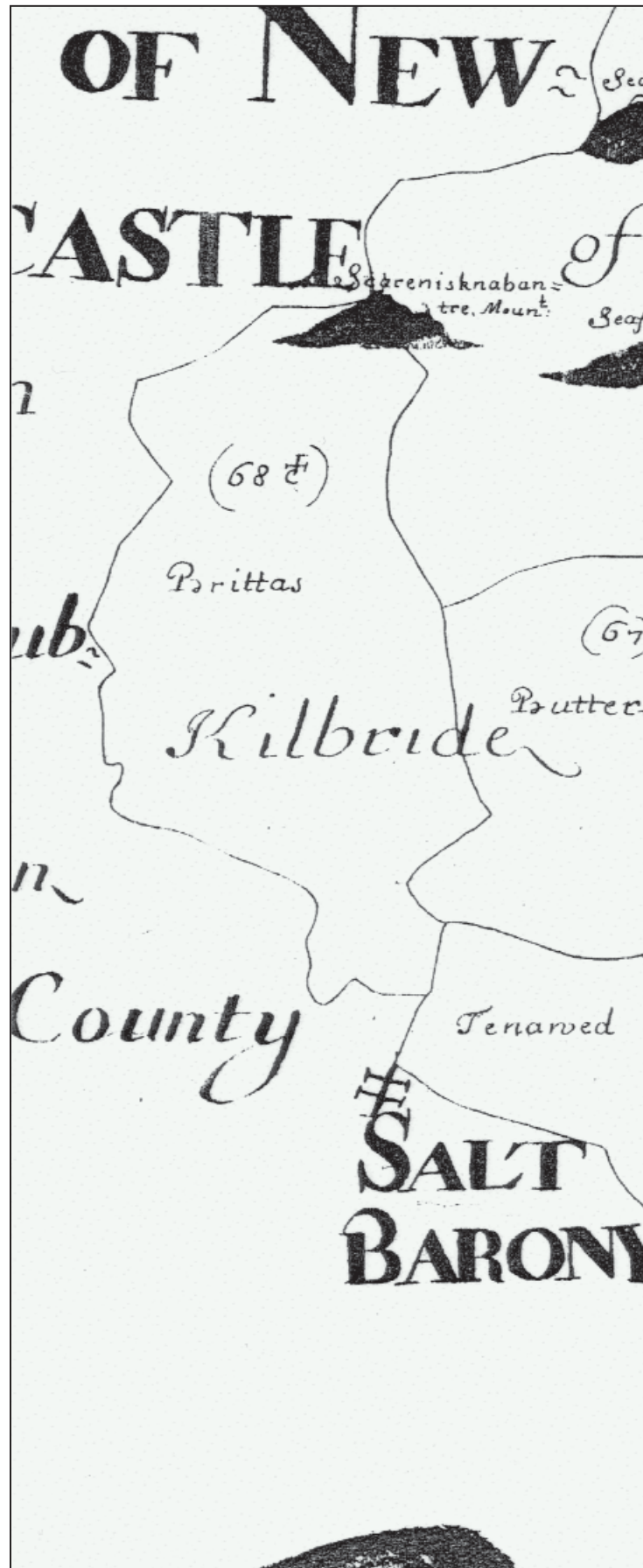




Figure 2: Noble and Keenan's Map of County Kildare (1752), showing the lands of 'Leeson's Esq.r'

The house is shown as a three-fronted building. This is clearly a pictographic representation and not meant to depict the house accurately.



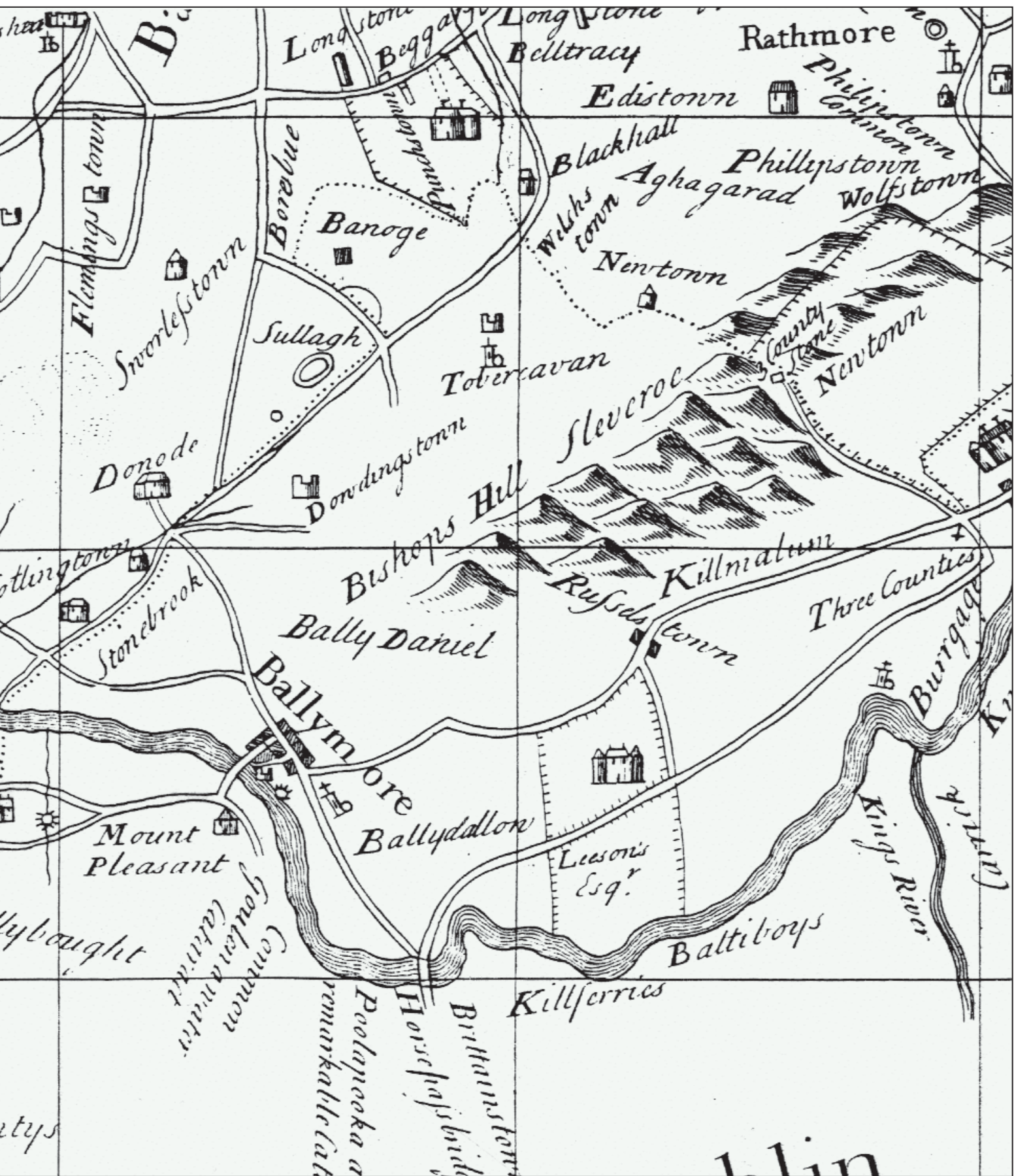
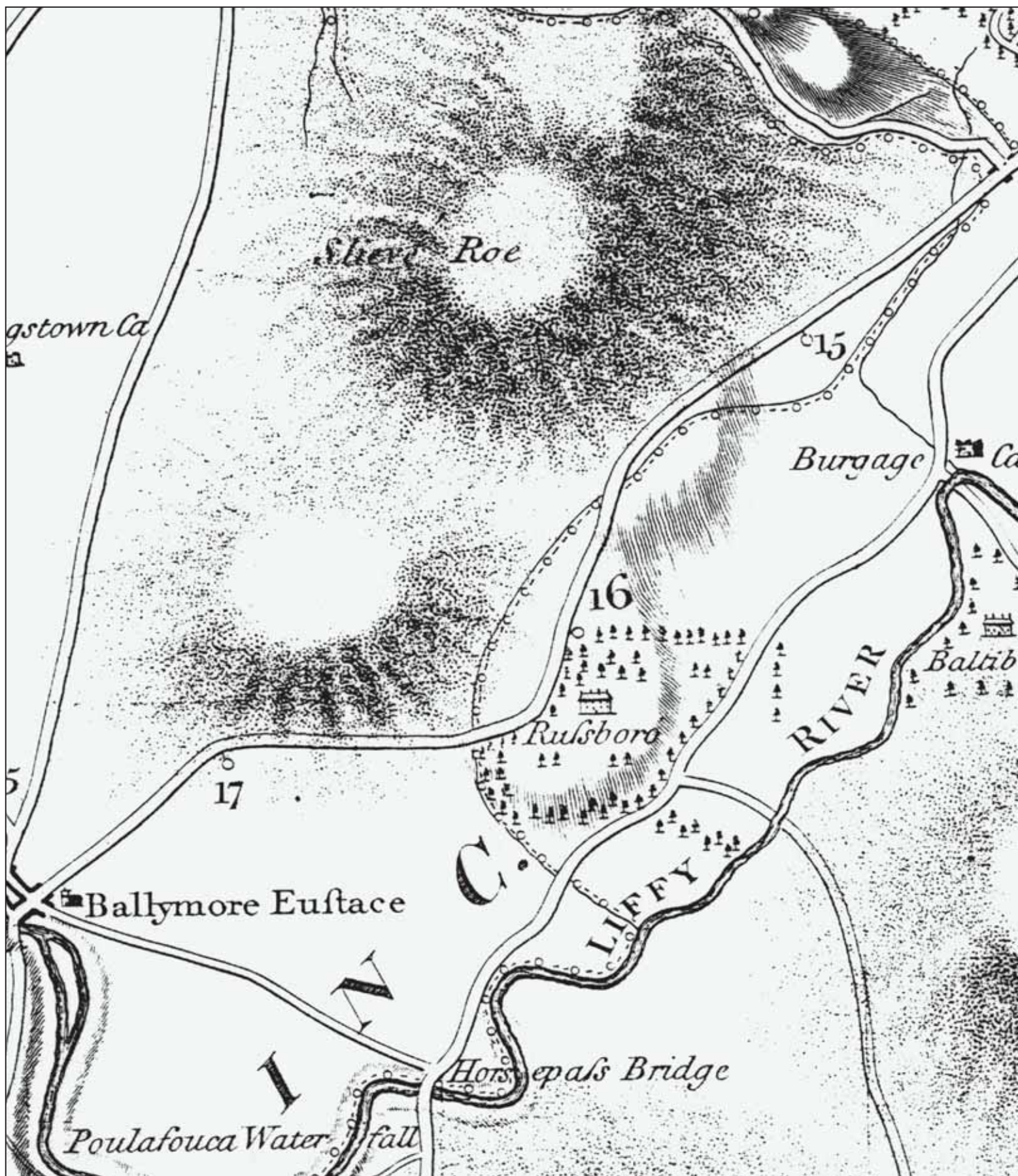






Figure 3: Rocque's Map of Dublin (1760), showing the demesne called 'Russels Town'

The house is accurately portrayed here, as are many of the landscape design features, and later identifiable on the OS maps in relict form. The map shows: formal planting to the north shot through with crow's-foot avenues; the lake to the north of the house; elements of the terracing; the bastion feature faintly outlined; block planting around the entrance; the Walled Garden; the less formal lake south of the house; and other formal planting blocks west of this lake, including some buildings, possibly the Lime Kiln. Two gate lodges are tentatively identified — one at the main gate and one in the north-western corner.



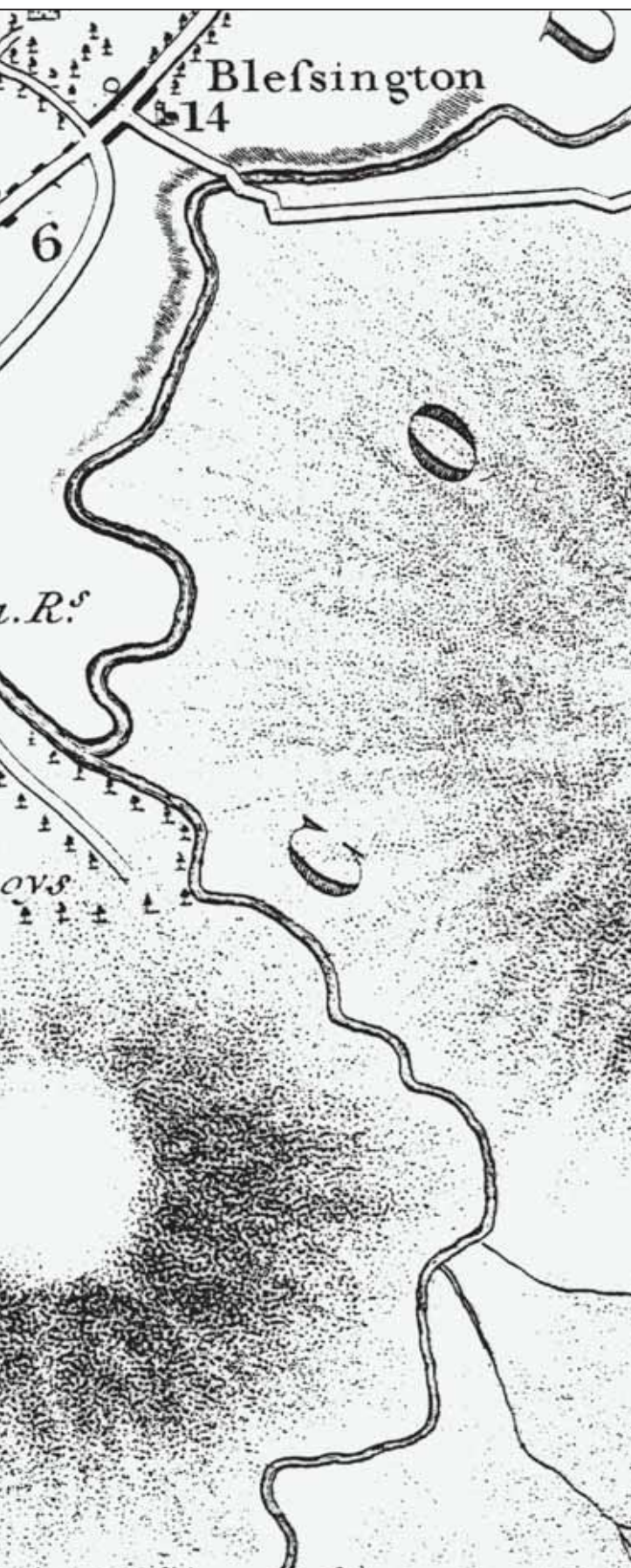


Figure 4: Alex Taylor's Map of County Kildare (1783)

Like Noble and Keenan's map, this is a purely pictographic map showing the house and the surrounding woodland. The house is not accurately portrayed. The surrounding roads are approximately correct, although no road is shown on the eastern border of the house or the entrance avenue. Apart from Jacob Nevill's map of Wicklow, this is the first time that the demesne is called 'Russboro'.

There is also an unnamed, undated Estate Map of Russborough in Lord Meath's Collection (not reproduced). Comparisons with Rocque and the first edition OS map would seem to put this unpublished sketch map somewhere towards the end of the 18th century or the beginning of the 19th. A number of estates in this area had maps drawn up at this time, including Blessington Demesne, which was drawn by John Langfield c. 1804. This may have been in the aftermath of the destruction caused to many of these houses during the Rebellion of 1798 by both the rebels and the crown forces.

All the fields are named, e.g. 'Three Corners Field', 'Potato Field', 'Lime Kiln Field' etc., as are other features such as 'Lady's Island'. All major features — including the Lime Kiln, the Ice House and the Moss House, mentioned in reports by tourists of the late 18th and early 19th centuries — are shown.



This map (left) is an accurate scale representation of the demesne at this time. Many of the present-day features are shown on this map, as are many features first shown on Rocque's 1760 map. Most of the formally planted blocks of trees are 'naturalised' — having lost their symmetrical layout. The lakes are still visible. The bastion is not shown. There is no evidence of the terracing. The remains of tree-lined avenues or walks in different parts of the demesne are shown. The field north-west of the house (no longer belonging to the demesne) contains one square pond and two possible tree-rings, mirroring each other on either side of a tree-lined walk. The Walled Garden is slightly different in shape, being now rectangular instead of square, but Rocque was not always completely accurate in his depiction of the scale of features. One building is shown within the Walled Garden, possibly the glasshouse that is still present in the middle of the gardens. The possible 'Lime Kiln', named on later maps, is marked on this map but not named. However, it is named on the original Fair Plan trace of the 1st edition, housed in the National Archives. The site of the 'Hippodrome' is shown as a circular treed area. The circular water walk, Lady's Island, is first shown on this edition. This is shown on the estate map which was never published. There are three gate lodges shown on the map — one at the main entrance, one in the north-western corner and one along the southern boundary of the main part of the demesne on the Blessington Road. A feature later given an RMP number (RMP 10:01) across the road in the other part of the demesne, described as a 'burial ground', is not shown at all.



Plate 5 and 6: Views of the Lime Kiln

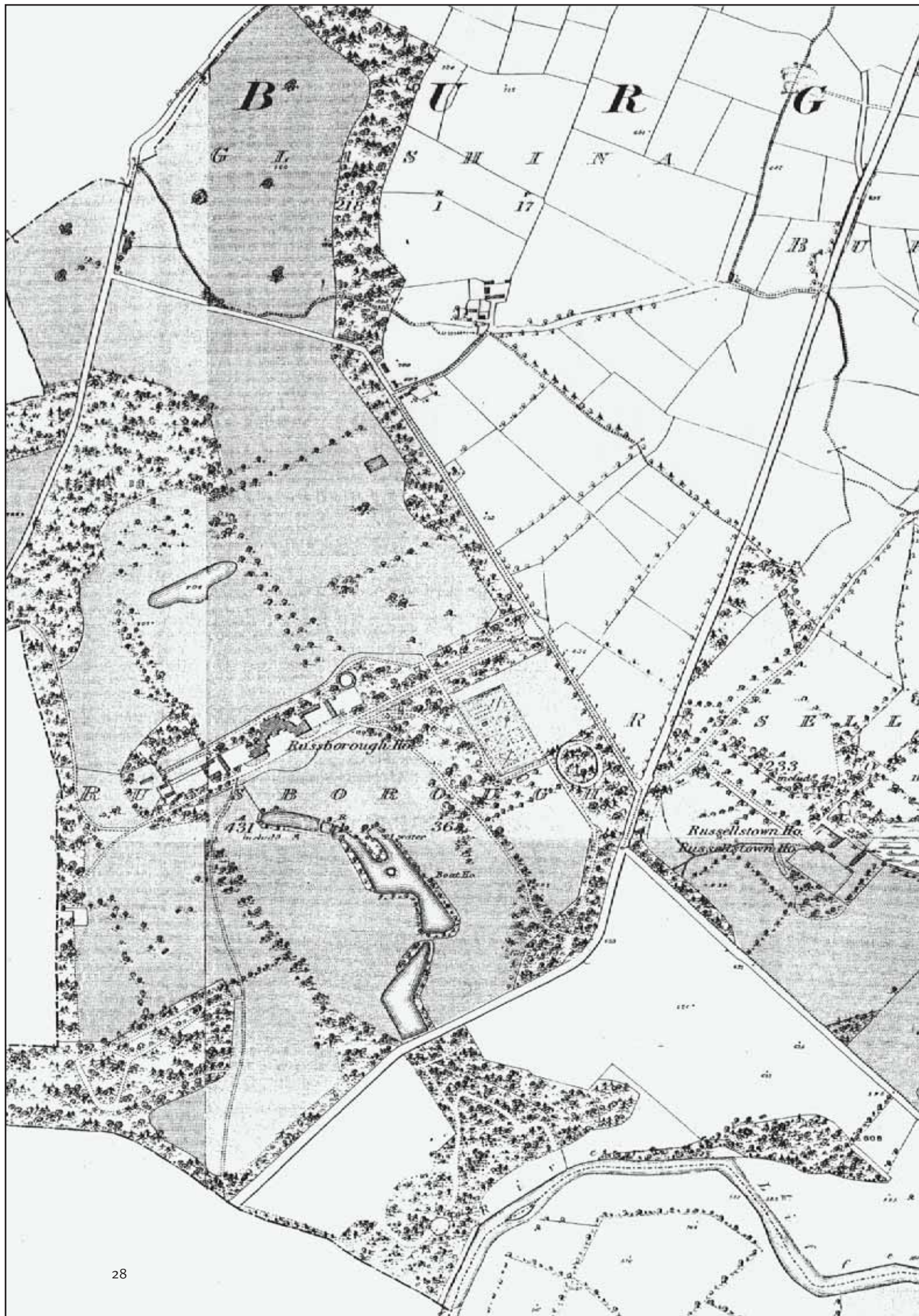


Figure 6: 2nd Edition OS map (6 inch) (1886)

Early garden features are even more naturalised in this edition (left). The lake south of the house remains the same shape but shows a border of trees around it. The 'crossings' over the lake are not named as footbridges. The small square pond north-east of the house is shown, but the 'tree-rings' no longer maintain their shape. There is no dramatic change in the layout of the farm buildings on either side, but the Hippodrome has been added since 1839. Additional buildings are also visible along the northern boundary of the Walled Garden. The possible Lime Kiln is still shown, as is a small dark square north-east of it which may be the 'Ice House'. The three gate lodges are still named on the map. Across the road, the feature now described as a burial ground is first outlined, with paths leading to it through dense woodland.



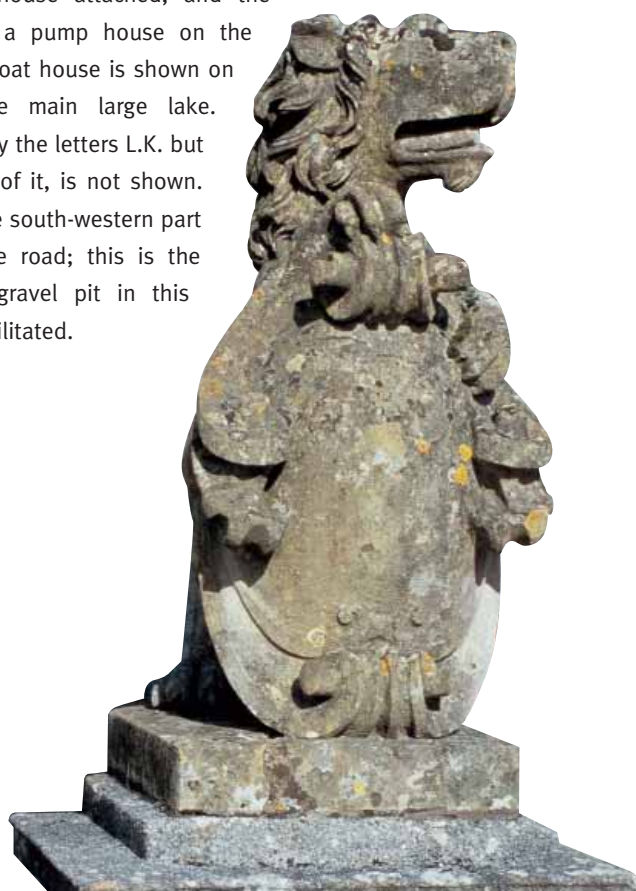
Plates 7 and 8: The Hippodrome: interior and exterior



Figure 7: 3rd Edition OS map (6 inch) (1909-11)

There are some significant differences between this edition (left) and the 2nd. The style of drawing is more representative, and as a result, none of the woodland blocks appears to be as dense as on the previous editions. Many of the tree-lined walks/avenues and the blocks of planting have completely lost their shape and the two possible tree-rings are represented by four trees together. The small square pond appears to be silting up and is shown with a symbol representing 'marsh' in the middle. There appear to be more farm building blocks to the south-west of the house. For the first time, a footbridge is noted crossing the circular water walk, south-east of the Walled Garden on an OS map (although a footbridge is also shown on the unpublished estate map, it is presumed to be up to one hundred years older). The features within the Walled Garden have changed somewhat, with less formally laid out squares of planting. One-half appears to be an orchard. No additional buildings are shown. The 'Lime Kiln' feature is still shown, although the square structure (possibly the Ice House) north of it is not. One of the gate lodges, that in the north-western corner, is now a ruin, the remains of which are still extant. The structure at the gate is still described as a gate lodge; that on the Blessington Road has become the Russborough Post Office. The remains of this building are still visible today. Across the road, the circular feature is first described as a 'burial ground'. There is a reference in G.E.C.'s *The Complete Peerage* to the fact that the sixth Earl of Milltown, Edward, was 'buried at Russborough in 1890'. However, his tomb is in fact north of the Forge Yard, close to the house. The origin of this burial ground is unknown.

The 3rd Edition OS (25 inch) (1909-11) (not reproduced) simply gives additional definition to features described above. It is interesting that the bastion feature is still not shown, even at this scale. It may have been filled in and then restored in the 20th century. The buildings in the Walled Garden are clearly glasshouses, as depicted by the use of cross-hatching to denote glass. The central structure has a shed and pump house attached, and the northern structures have a pump house on the external northern wall. A boat house is shown on the eastern side of the main large lake. The Lime Kiln is denoted by the letters L.K. but the Ice House, north-east of it, is not shown. A gravel pit is shown in the south-western part of the demesne, near the road; this is the precursor to the larger gravel pit in this location, now being rehabilitated.



## AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY

On 18 February and 24 March 2001, an aerial survey was undertaken in order to define more clearly the terracing north of the house and to identify, if possible, the archaeological crop mark (RMP 5A:01) noted in aerial photographs from the 1970s (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Detail from Ordnance Survey aerial photograph (GSIAP 332), with area of interest and RMP 5A:01 site location

Oblique photographs can be calibrated using ground controls derived from Ordnance Survey mapping. The visible features are then digitised to produce CAD (Computer Aided Design) drawings of the archaeological sites/topographical features. The accuracy of the image calibration is normally dictated by the quality of the OS map sources. At Russborough, sub-metre accuracy was achieved using the Rural Place Map (1997-99) at a scale of 1:200 (Figure 9). The results were used to compare current topographical features with historic map sources. This level of accuracy is suitable for illustrative and analytical purposes, and in determining spatial extent. John Rocque's map of Dublin, depicting Russborough (Figure 10), was 'rubber-sheeted' over this map to get an impression of what features, visible in 1760, had disappeared or survived (Figure 11).

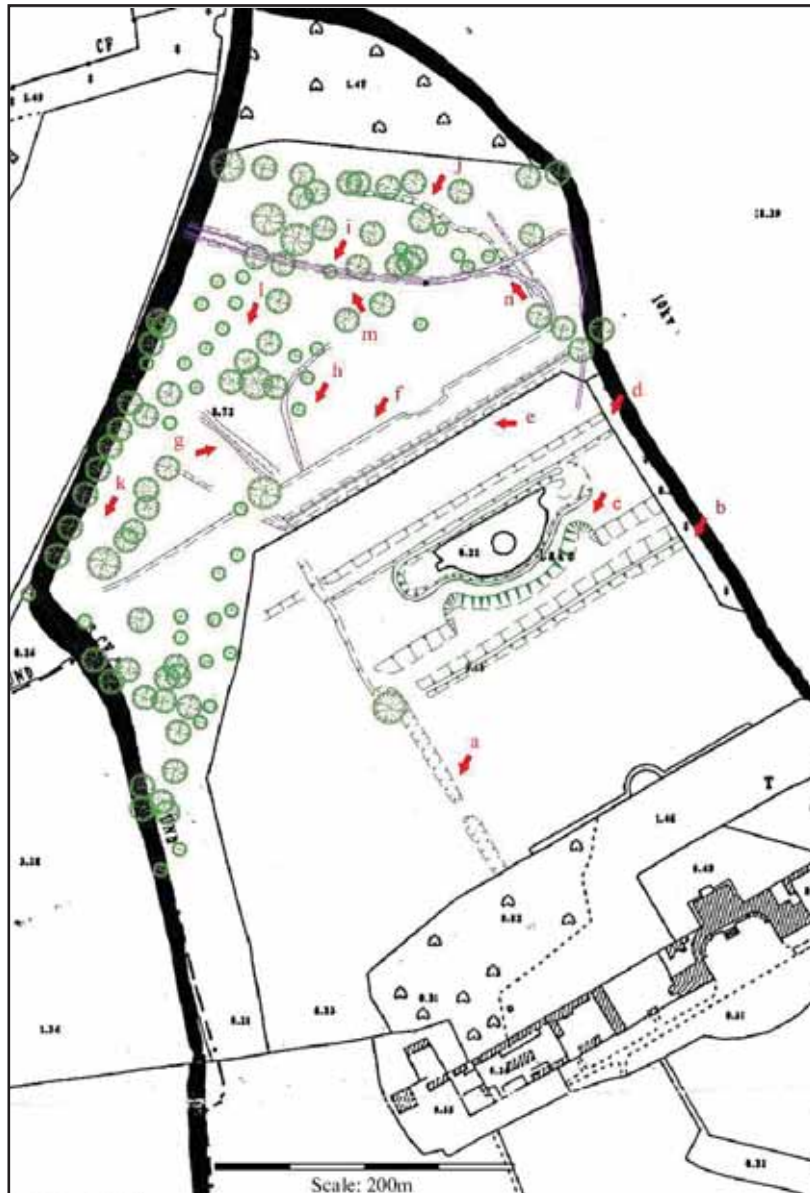


Figure 9: Ordnance Survey Rural Place Map (1997-99) with landscape features digitised from oblique aerial photography

KEY	
• Terracing digitised from aerial photographs	■
• Pathways digitised from aerial photographs	■
• Specific terraces are labelled a, b, c, d, e, f, and j	
• Specific avenues are labelled g, k, l, m and n	
• Specific pathways are labelled h and i	

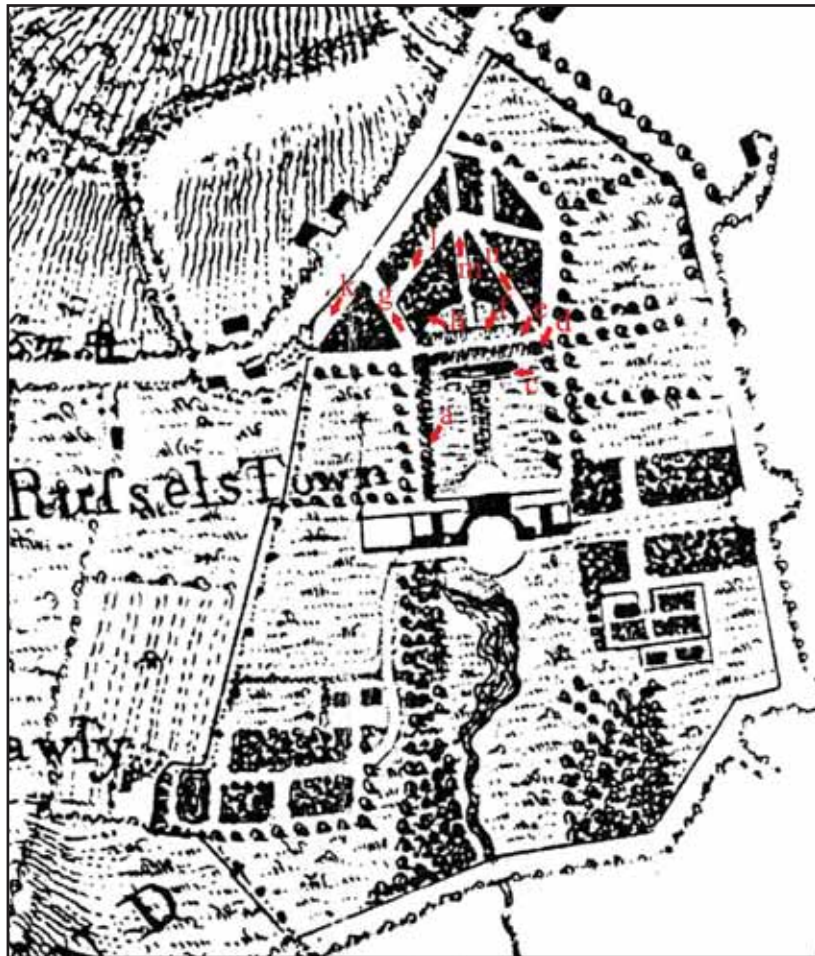


Figure 10: Detail from Rocque map (1760). Identified are: terraces (a, b, c, d, e, f, j); avenues (g, k, l, m, n); and pathways (h, i)



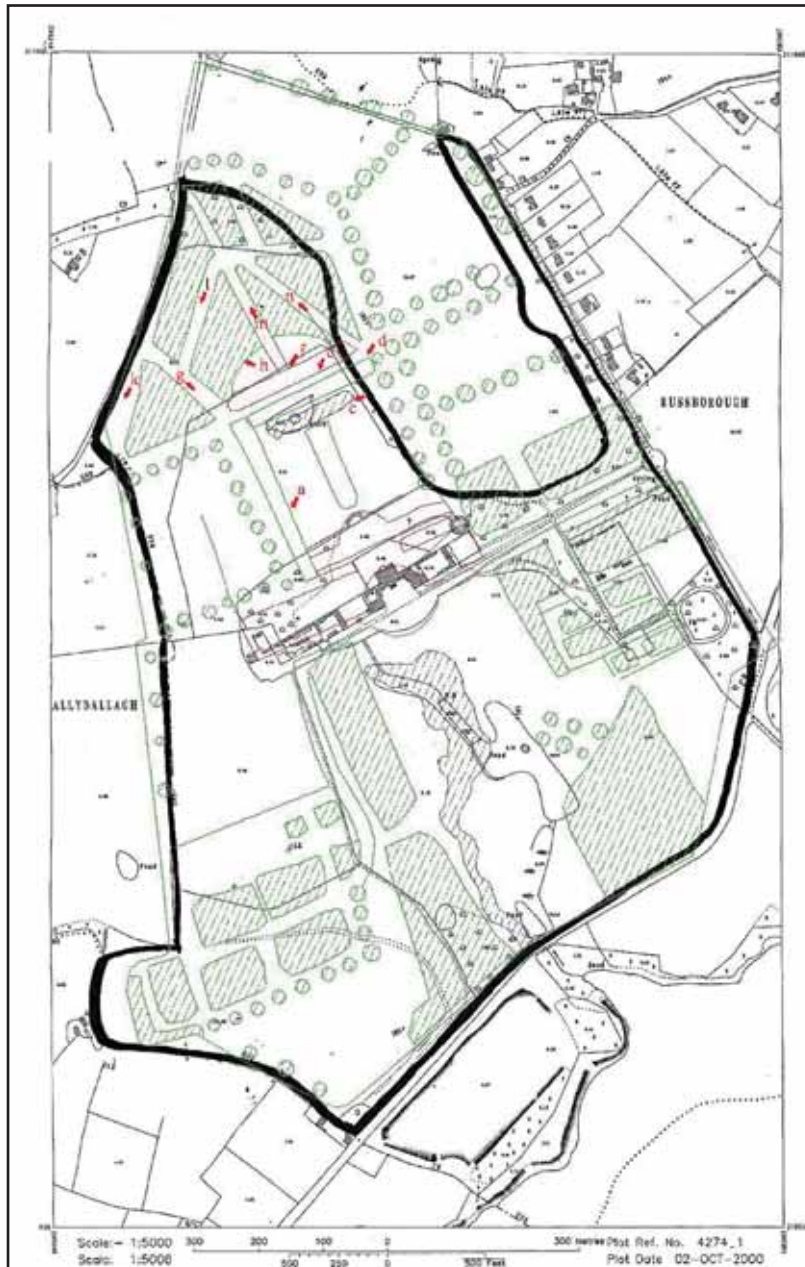


Figure 11: Ordnance Survey Rural Place Map (1997-99) and site boundary, overlaid with landscape and garden features derived from 1760 Rocque Map ('rubber-sheeted' version)

KEY	
• Garden features visible in Rocque map	■
• Water features visible in Rocque map	■
• Terracing and buildings visible in Rocque map	■

A series of terracing, avenues and walks was identified from the air. Six levels of terracing were traceable, and a number of the avenues correspond with those depicted on Rocque. In particular, the semi-circular terrace (marked 'h' on Figures 9 and 11), which is depicted in Rocque, clearly survives on the ground (Plate 9). This feature was probably created to mirror the semi-circular façade of the house and the bastion feature north of the house, a device of the geometric style of landscaping popular during this period.

Despite extensive photographic coverage of this zone, the crop mark (RMP 5A:01) was not identified. This was surprising, given the near perfect weather conditions for such features. It was felt that perhaps the original crop mark was soil discoloration in a ploughed zone, rather than a negative ditch feature showing due to differential grass-growth. Other circular features were noted along the edges of the fifth terrace, but were thought mostly to relate to slippage caused by the trampling of livestock. No other sub-surface features were noted.

#### Plates 9 – 13: Oblique Aerial Photography of Landscape Features



Plate 9: The pond and northern terracing (a, b, c, d, e, f) looking west



Plate 10: The pond and landscaping (terraces a and c) to the south



Plate 11: A close-up of the pond landscaping (c)



Plate 12: The repeating terraces (b, c, d, e, f) surrounding the pond



Plate 13: The curved and northern-most terrace (j) and pathway (i)

## 2.2 THE HOUSE

### INTRODUCTION

Russborough is one of the finest Palladian houses in Ireland, and an excellent example of the work of Richard Castle (c. 1690–1751), one of the most prominent and prolific architects of the 18th century.

Eighteenth-century Irish architecture was strongly influenced by the work of the Venetian architect, Andrea Palladio (1508–80), whose signature style was a formal geometry based around a central block, colonnade and wings, a restrained use of ornament, and a reliance on beautiful proportions. However, where Palladio's interiors were decorated with frescoes and thick Renaissance plasterwork, the Neo-Palladian style used the light, elegant plasterwork of the Rococo movement (Beit, 1978).

Joseph Leeson travelled extensively in Europe and made two long visits to Rome, in 1744 and 1751, where he purchased an extensive collection of Roman material, much of which forms part of the Milltown Collection. The latter visit took place during the year in which Richard Castle died at Carton. It is believed that Francis Bindon, a successful artist and amateur architect, then took over the work at Russborough, particularly the interior work, although he may have been an assistant to Castle all along (Benedetti, 1997). The plainer decorative style of the bedrooms is attributed to him (O'Reilly, 1998).

### ARCHITECTURAL FORM

The house is not approached from the front along a main avenue but rather from the side. This device, also used by Castle at Powerscourt, maximises the effect of the great forecourt and the dramatically long façade by revealing it slowly as one approaches.

Plates 14 – 17: Russborough is approached from the side, with its south-facing façade revealed slowly



Plate 14



Plate 15



Plate 16



Plate 17

The main (south-facing) façade is approximately 700 feet (213 metres) long. It consists of a seven-bay central block of two storeys over basement which is joined by curving Doric colonnades to wings of two storeys and seven bays which are themselves linked to outbuildings by walls with rusticated arches (Bence-Jones, 1978). Castle used the orders in a hierarchical fashion — Corinthian for the residence, Doric for the colonnades, Ionic for the advancing wings, and a robust astylar treatment for the ranges beyond (O'Reilly, 1998).

Despite its imposing façade, Russborough is not a big house — the central block is only three rooms across. This probably helped to achieve a consistency of style and assisted the development of an interior of lavish and complementary decoration throughout the principal rooms.

## EXTERNAL DESCRIPTION

The house is constructed in granite from the local Golden Hill quarry. The main entrance is approached by a broad flight of 17 shallow steps, with flanking balustrades guarded by rampant lions. The central three bays are advanced within a pediment surround with Corinthian pilasters and a swagged frieze. The central door with its semi-circular fanlight is flanked by 9/9 sliding sash windows, all within moulded stone architraves similar to the flanking bays.

There is a deep moulded cornice across at first-floor level with diminished (3/3) sliding sash windows above. The eaves course is finished in a raised parapet topped by stone urns. Set back behind the parapet is a natural slate hipped roof with granite chimneys around a central lantern light.

Each curved colonnade, in Doric style, has three semi-circular niches on each side of a central door into the link corridor behind. The niches contain 12



Plate 18: Shallow steps approach the main entrance

classically inspired statues, the whole composition being unique in Ireland. The flanking pavilions are identical. The sides facing into the centre are four bays wide and simply detailed with 6/6 sliding sash windows and diminished 3/3 windows above. The walls are finished with a parapet cornice with urns similar to the central block. The front façade is seven bays wide; the central three bays are slightly advanced, articulated by Ionic pilasters. The central window at ground floor has a semi-circular fanlight; otherwise, windows are similar to the side wall.



Plate 19: Flanking balustrade with urn and lion at the main entrance

Beyond these wings are plain walls running to impressive rusticated arches leading to the East and West Courtyards. These have segmental pediments, each with a clock, and a small campanile on top of a pitched roof behind.

The rear (north) façade of the central block is plain except for the cornice and urns on the parapet, and a pair of Corinthian columns with an entablature framing the centre window in the lower storey. The remainder of this façade is contained within a screen wall with blind arcading.

## WEST AND EAST COURTYARDS

The range to the west consists of the stable yards and farmyards, mostly now disused. The range to the east consists of inner, middle and outer courtyards with estate offices, now used as visitor services facilities and residences. To the north of the outer courtyard is the Hippodrome.

## ALTERATIONS

No significant alterations have taken place to the external appearance of the main house, except for the modern visitor services block. This can be seen by comparing Rocque's map of 1760 (Figure 3) with recent ground plans of the house.

## INTERNAL DESCRIPTION

All seven principal rooms are on the ground floor of the central block and lead from one to another in succession around the central hall. They all have ceilings of magnificent Baroque plasterwork, creating an extravagance quite in contrast with the austere exterior.

The plasterwork is at least partly the work of the Lafrancini family (Plate 31), but O'Reilly (1998) suggests that the 'unmitigated extravagance of the stucco in the staircase hall... must surely suggest the hand of a less restrained artist, presumably local'.

Each room is magnificently appointed, with the most significant features including:

- floors of inlaid marquetry
- the Music Room floor with its unique resonance and reference to a 'mechanical device'
- the Cuban mahogany door and window surrounds and doors
- the original marble chimney-pieces
- the Drawing Room wall panels designed for the Vernet paintings
- the Cuban mahogany staircase





Plate 20: The Main Hall



Plate 21: Plasterwork ceiling of the Main Hall



Plate 22: One of the mahogany doors leading from the Main Hall



Plate 23: A white marble fire surround with inlaid coloured marble by Pietro Bossi

By contrast, the first floor of the main house is restrained in decorative treatment, reflecting, it is suggested, the hand of Francis Bindon who is believed to have completed the house following the death of Richard Castle. The bedrooms are all arranged around a central hall (again typical of Irish Georgian) which is lit by a large lantern light. This is supported on two slender columns which were encased by Sir Alfred Beit to resemble more substantial marble columns.

The colonnades are backed by a curving link corridor to each side wing. The East Pavilion is plainly detailed — the most significant feature being the double-height former kitchen. This wing now contains staff and visitor facilities on the ground floor, with a staff apartment above.

The West Pavilion is also plainly detailed and is now Lady Beit's residence.

## ENTRANCE GATES

The principal estate entrance passes through a heavily rusticated and pedimented archway, with flanking pedimented doorways. The overall impression is one of plainness, relieved only by the deep chamfered joints and the raised lion statuettes which adorn the pediment. In plan, the central gates fold back into reveals in which there are tall niches. The gate is considered to be fine example of early Palladian architecture, inspired by the triumphal archways of Roman architecture (Howley, 1993).



Plate 24: Main entrance gate

In front of the house is a long, six-bar iron railing which is broken to each side by a delicate pair of gates with semi-circular iron bracing, and flanked by stone obelisks on high stone bases. The obelisks measure only 16 feet (4.88 metres) in height and are appropriate to the scale of the house. Both sets of identical gates are clearly visible from the house and lead into a field that runs down to the artificial lake (Howley, 1993). The field gates and main entrance gate are both thought to be contemporary with the building of the house and were probably designed by Castle. Castle is thought to have designed a number of other obelisks, including those at Belan in County Kildare and the magnificent Connolly's Folly at Castletown (Howley, 1993).



Plate 25: Lion statuettes atop the entrance pediment

## 2.3 THE ARCHITECT — RICHARD CASTLE

The German architect, Richard Castle (Cassells), was one of the foremost architects of this period. David Griffin of the Irish Architectural Archive (IAA) is currently compiling a book on his life and works, the first comprehensive biography of Castle. For the moment, the main biographical source is a short summary by Desmond Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin (1964).

Castle was probably born in Hesse Kassel, Germany, in c. 1690, of Huguenot parents. His parents' names are unknown, and it is believed that he took the name 'Cassell' or 'Kassel' from his hometown (this was then anglicised to Castle) (Fitzgerald, 1964). An unpublished report, *The Milltown Leesons* by Francis Leeson (1967), states that his real name was De Richardi, but the source of this information is not given. David Griffin (IAA) also states that this is believed to be the original family name but that it cannot be confirmed.

In about 1725, Castle came to England to study waterworks and architecture, and it is believed that he was greatly influenced by the English Palladian architects of the time. In 1728, he met Sir Gustavus Hume, accompanying him to Ireland and designing Castle Hume in County Fermanagh for him.

Also in 1728, Edward Lovett Pearce employed him as a draughtsman on the new Parliament House. Pearce also wrote to the Members of the Irish Parliament recommending Castle as an architect. This appears to have had a great effect, because in the following 30 years, 17 MPs (six later became peers), eight peers, two peeresses, five bishops and two archbishops made use of him or his clerk and pupil, John Ensor (Fitzgerald, 1964).



In 1729, Castle carried out work at both Strokestown and French Park in County Roscommon, although the original architect of either house it is not clear. There is a possibility that it may have been Castle, but tradition has it that both were by a 'Dutch' architect.

By 1733, when he married June Truffet of Lisburn, County Down, at the Huguenot Church in Dublin, Castle had completed a considerable body of work, including a number of significant country residences: Hazelwood in County Sligo; Westport in County Mayo; Summerhill in County Meath; and Powerscourt in County Wicklow. In addition, he was involved in a number of public works, including the Newry Canal project. He also designed a number of urban dwellings in Dublin and some buildings at Trinity College. In 1739, he was commissioned to design the re-building of Carton for the Earl of Kildare, probably his most significant commission so far. Around the same time, he designed the obelisk at Castletown, County Kildare, for Mrs Conolly. It is unclear whether he was the original architect of Castletown House. On stylistic grounds, however, it is thought to be one of Castle's works.

In 1741, Joseph Leeson, then an MP, commissioned him to design and build Russborough. Castle died before it was finished, however, and it was probably completed by Francis Bindon.

During the time Russborough was being built, Castle continued his thriving practice, completing a significant corpus of urban residences and other public buildings, including the Music Hall in Fishamble Street where Handel famously premiered 'The Messiah', and Kildare (Leinster) House, for the Earl of Kildare. He also designed many more country houses, though none on the scale of Russborough or Carton.

## 2.4 THE FAMILIES OF RUSSBOROUGH

### THE LEESON FAMILY — EARLS OF MILLTOWN

The Leeson family appears to have originated in Northamptonshire, moving to Ireland in the second half of the 17th century. Hugh Leeson, a sergeant in the army of Charles II, began a brewery business and gradually became more prosperous. In 1664, he acquired Lot 5, South Saint Stephen's Green ('Leeson Walk'). Hugh was buried around 1700. His only son, Joseph, continued the brewery business but also had a talent for property development. He married the daughter of Dublin Alderman Andrew Brice; it is unclear how many children they had, although some are known to have died at birth (Benedetti, 1997). His one surviving son, Joseph Jnr, married Cecilia Leigh in 1729. With two sons and one daughter, their marriage was far from a happy one. Cecilia died in 1737, and one month later, Leeson married Anne Preston. She was young and rich, with important and influential relatives (Benedetti, 1997).

Joseph Leeson Snr died in 1741, leaving a substantial inheritance to Joseph Jnr which was estimated at a £50,000 lump sum with £6,000 *per annum* (*Gentleman's Magazine* in Benedetti, 1997). It was with this money that Leeson

purchased the lands at Russelltown, later to be known as Russborough. The brewery was leased for 31 years. The *Vestry Book* of St Mary's in Blessington noted that, on 22 December 1742, Joseph Leeson and his family purchased the right to be seated in row 20 of the church, a common custom among the upper classes of the time (RCB Library Archives). While the house was being built, he undertook a grand tour during which he acquired many works of art for his new mansion. He undertook another tour in 1751, this time with his son and nephew. Unfortunately, no travelling account books survive to describe these tours (Benedetti, 1997).

Leeson became MP for Rathcormack in 1743 and served until 1756. He was created Baron of Russborough on 5 May 1756, taking his seat in parliament two days later. On 8 September 1760, he was created Viscount of Russborough, becoming Earl of Milltown on 10 May 1763 (Doubleday & de Walden, 1932). His second wife, Anne Preston, died in 1766; a third marriage, to Elizabeth French, took place in 1768. Leeson died on 2 October 1783, aged 72; he was buried in Dublin. His widow survived him by more than 58 years and died on 23 January 1842.

The second Earl of Milltown, also called Joseph, was born in 1730 but died unmarried at Chelsea in November of 1801. The third Earl, Brice, the brother of Joseph, the second Earl, was born in 1735. He married Maria Graydon, daughter of John Graydon from whom Leeson purchased the lands at Russelltown. Brice died in 1807 and his son, also Joseph, became the fourth Earl. Joseph was born in 1799 and had been styled 'Viscount of Russborough' before his father's death. He married Barbara Tilson in 1828 and died in 1866 of bronchitis. His place of death is not recorded, nor is that of his father. It is interesting to note that there are no death records for any of the Leeson family in the records of St Mary's Parish Church, Blessington (RCB Library Archives). Benedetti (1997) notes that over the period from 1770 to the mid 19th century, the Milltowns lived less and less at Russborough, preferring their house in Saint Stephen's Green.

Joseph's son, Henry, became the fifth Earl of Milltown; he died, unmarried, of 'congestion of the lungs' in 1871 at Russborough. His brother, Edward, became the sixth Earl; he married Geraldine Evelyn Stanhope in 1871.

In 1890, Edward died suddenly at the age of 54; he was buried on the grounds at Russborough (Doubleday & de Walden, 1932). This, however, is not the origin of the 'Burial Ground' shown on the third edition OS map (1909-11) (Figure 7), later given a Sites and Monuments Record number by the Archaeological Survey. The tomb of the sixth Earl is located north of the Forge Yard in an overgrown wooded area but is unfortunately not noted on the 3rd edition OS map. No record of ground having been consecrated at Russborough was found in the parish or diocesan records for St Mary's, Blessington, but it may be that a vicar who was a friend of the family carried it out (Susan Hood, RCB Library pers. com.) or that it was carried out retrospectively. The 'burial ground' across the road, in the other part of the demesne, remains a mystery.

Geraldine, the wife of the sixth Earl, bequeathed much of the Milltown Collection to the National Gallery before her death in 1914. The seventh and last Earl, Henry, the only surviving brother of the sixth Earl, died unmarried in 1891. Since then,



the title has remained dormant, though heirs probably do exist (Doubleday & de Walden, 1932).

## THE BEIT FAMILY

The following extracts are taken from an article by Sir Alfred Beit, entitled 'The Alfred Beit Foundation', in the *An Taisce Journal* (undated but by reference, shortly after the foundation was set up on 23 March 1976). Further information is in *The Beit Collection* by Homan Potterton, published by the National Gallery of Ireland in 1988:

*'Alfred Beit (born Hamburg, Germany, 1853, died, unmarried, Hertfordshire, England, 1906) landed at Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in 1875 and soon after made his way to Kimberley, where the new diamond discoveries were attracting prospectors, speculators and all sorts of lesser fry. In Kimberly he met Cecil Rhodes, the great imperialist, and became a firm friend and partner. Together they founded the De Beers Diamond Mining Company, which today continues to control the world output of diamonds.*

*After the gold discoveries in the Transvaal in the early 1890s, Alfred Beit moved to Johannesburg, but he had already at that time established himself in London and about 1895 built himself a house in Park Lane, long since demolished.*

*As a man of taste, he had started from the late 1880s to acquire works of art, mainly pictures and Renaissance bronzes, and he continued collecting until his death in 1906, when he left his collection to his younger brother Otto, father of the writer of this article.*

*There appeared in Country Life in January 1937 two well illustrated articles concerning Russborough, Co. Wicklow, by Brian Fitzgerald. I was immediately struck by these articles, to the extent that I copied the dining room chimney piece, shown in the second article, in a house I was then doing up in London. Fine plasterwork and Palladian style architecture, as modified in the 18th century, nearly 200 years after Palladio's death, have always fascinated me, and I could read in these articles, and see from the illustrations what a splendid example of this style Russborough is.*

*Soon after came the War: I served in the RAF and thought no more about this splendid house. Then in 1952 when I was living in South Africa, it was put on the market and advertised in the same magazine, Country Life. I immediately went over to Ireland, met the then owner, Capt. Denis Daly, and bought the property.*

*If I had been told a month earlier that I was going to live in Ireland, with which I had absolutely no connection — although my wife had an Anglo-Irish grandmother who, however, had married and left Ireland in the early years of this century — and would move my art collection there, I would have told my informant that he needed his head attending to.'*

## 2.5 THE COLLECTIONS AND THE COLLECTORS

### THE MILLTOWN COLLECTION

Russborough was once the home for what is now known as the Milltown Collection, created by generations of the Leeson family and ultimately donated to the National Gallery of Ireland. The principal collectors were Joseph Leeson II (1701-1783), first Lord Milltown; and Joseph Leeson III (1730-1801), second Lord Milltown.

By 1741, building at Russborough had commenced. Joseph Leeson, later the first Lord Milltown, wished to fill his fine house and undertook his first grand tour. Unfortunately, it appears that most of the purchases of the 1740s tour never made it to Ireland. On 9 March 1745, Horace Mann, the British Envoy at Florence, mentioned in a letter to Horace Walpole that the *Augustus Caesar*, ‘with some £60,000 worth of goods, and many pictures, statues, etc. of one Mr Leeson, a rich Irishman’, had been captured by the French (Francis Leeson, 1967).

Joseph II went on tour with his son Joseph III in 1751, and it is believed that many fine works of art, as well as furniture and statues, were acquired during this visit. Portraits of both Joseph II and Joseph III were completed during this period by Reynolds and Battoni, among others. These now form part of the Milltown Collection; Sergio Benedetti (1997) describes many of the works acquired in detail.

### JOSEPH LEESON V (1799-1866) — FOURTH LORD MILLTOWN

According to Francis Leeson (1967): ‘Joseph also seems to have inherited some of his great-grandfather’s taste for classical art, for he added to the collection of pictures at Russborough and brought back some very fine bronzes from Italy for the house.’ Leeson also implies that many changes were made to the collection during the fourth Earl’s time. Some of this may have occurred in the late 1840s in the aftermath of the Famine. There are reports (e.g. Mrs Smith) that ‘Lord Milltown had to sell his plate and precious horses...’.

### GERALDINE EVELYN STANHOPE, WIFE OF THE SIXTH LORD MILLTOWN

Geraldine Evelyn Stanhope outlived her husband, Edward Nugent Leeson, by many years. They had no offspring, and in memory of her husband, she made over the contents of the house to the National Gallery of Ireland in 1902, thus forming the Milltown Collection. Four rooms in the central area of the gallery were added to house this bequest. The area is still called the Milltown Wing, although the gallery has since been reorganised and the Milltown paintings have been merged with the general collection.



Plate 26: Floor tiles commemorating Geraldine Evelyn Stanhope

## THE BEIT COLLECTION

From the late 1880s, Alfred Beit (1853-1906) started to acquire works of art, mainly pictures and Renaissance bronzes; he continued collecting until his early death. He left his collection to his younger brother, Otto, who in turn bequeathed it to his son, Sir Alfred Beit.

*'Alfred Beit was largely guided in his acquisitions by Dr Wilhelm Bode, director of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin. Indeed Bode was more than an adviser; unlike the museum directors of today he acted as a dealer and through him many of the great master pieces of the collection were bought. Bode also wrote the catalogue of the Pictures and the bronzes in the collection in 1913, which was privately printed and a few copies still exist. The text of the catalogue was written in a somewhat effusive style, in which he flatteringly attributed to his client a more intimate knowledge of the arts than he probably possessed; such knowledge was more likely to have been Bode's.'* (Beit, 1978)

A copy of this catalogue resides at Russborough in the possession of Lady Beit, together with a similar catalogue detailing the pottery and porcelain in Sir Otto Beit's ownership in the second decade of the 20th century.

Sir Alfred himself made many changes to his namesake's original collection. Indeed, once he had purchased Russborough, other aspects of the collection developed, such as the re-acquisition of the four Vernets in the Drawing Room.

There does not, however, appear to be a comprehensive catalogue of all these artefacts.

The Alfred Beit Foundation was set up on 23 March 1976.

*'... estate transferred in 1976 to the Alfred Beit Foundation, a charitable and educational trust which was established with the object of keeping the house and art collection intact, making it a centre for the arts and open to the public.'* (Beit, 1978).

Sir Alfred donated 17 paintings to the National Gallery of Ireland in 1986. In 1988, the National Gallery of Ireland published the catalogue, *The Beit Collection*. Unfortunately, this book is now out of print and the gallery library does not appear to hold a copy. It is understood that the gallery is preparing a new catalogue of the paintings which will undoubtedly record this part of the Beit Collection properly.

## 2.6 LANDSCAPE, BUILT FEATURES AND HABITATS

### THE EARLY LANDSCAPE

At present, there is little evidence of the landscape prior to Joseph Leeson's purchase in 1741, although it is entirely possible that early field archaeology survives in the Park.

### A PALLADIAN LANDSCAPE

Evidence for a Palladian landscape is drawn almost entirely from the Rocque County Survey of 1760, and surviving field evidence. However, this evidence alone provides a substantial record of a Palladian landscape contemporary with the house.

With the changing tastes of the 1740s-70s, the relationship between house and landscape would have gone out of fashion quite quickly. However, these stylistic changes do enable the landscape to be defined by certain characteristics. Most notably, the landscape enjoys a striking outlook, with strong central axial vistas, formal and informal waters, as found on the most important landscapes of the 1730s and 1740s. The woodland is disposed as shady walks or avenues, belts, open grazed groves, enclosed gardens and a wilderness divided by allées. With an asymmetrical layout, it is firmly distinguishable from the French or Anglo-Dutch influence of the 1710s as well as the rolling, open landscape park with belts and clumps of the later 1750s onwards.

The landscape also reflects that the house was used as a villa and art collection rather than as a home. With the park subdivided as in Switzer's rural gardening of the 1720s, the landscape continued to be farmed, although it was less formally ornamented than Switzer. It is an improved Augustan landscape, like Pope's *ample lawns... not asham'd to feed*, as well as a setting for seasonal visits and picnics away from Dublin. Site evidence points to unmodified formal terraces and trees on banks. Comparable with Bridgeman landscapes in England in the 1730s, it is not quite the pastoral slopes of a Kent landscape like Rousham or an early Capability Brown like Stowe in the 1750s. It is a consciously Augustan layout with no hint of Chinoiserie or Gothick.

### LATER CHANGES

Longevity is the great preserver of designed landscapes. The very long life of Joseph Leeson's third wife, Geraldine, seems to have conserved this landscape without extensive alteration well into the Victorian era, thus explaining the remarkable lack of change recorded by 1839. Some of the perimeter belts are wider; a circular moated garden is plotted, but that to the west is not. The Walled Garden appears rebuilt, and two well-concealed gate houses are shown, although these may have been original. A circular garden (on the site of the Hippodrome) and farm buildings were added on either side of the service wings,



Plate 27:  
Walk to garden  
and island



Plate 28: Woodland in west field

and shrubberies to the north elevation. This latter is the most significant, symbolising abandonment of the north lawn and the central canal, lost by 1839.

By 1886, changes were eroding rather than altering the original design. There were lakeside plantings to the southern pond; a boathouse; removal of a major bank, retaining the trees; removal of much of the north elevation shrubbery (incidentally reopening the north lawn); extension of the park to the north; and a Burial Ground to the south. A Peach House and lean-tos had been added to the Walled Garden.

By 1911, there were more determined changes: adding an island to the formal pond; removing fences from the wilderness and some belts to create open parkland; a steam tram along the highway; and good-quality planting of the rhododendron garden and island garden with 'modern' azaleas, rhododendrons and specimen conifers. Even this latter work, although notable, is modest given the scale of the plantsman's phase established at other gardens.

## RUSSBOROUGH TODAY

The development of the Poul-a-Phouca dam has created a new landscape feature to the main axis, and part of the perimeter wall was deliberately lowered. But with the impact on the picturesque waterfall, the development has been less kind to the wider historic landscape. Significant losses continue:

- disposal by sale of some of the wider landscape setting
- loss of the north-east park, particularly affecting the north lawn
- gravel working of the south-west corner
- limited garden development immediately adjacent to the house
- recent planning consents in the northern part of the park
- decay of historic structures including walls, glasshouses and pond embankments
- accelerating tree loss in the park
- intrusion of modern fences and small structures within the park



Plate 29: A view of Russborough

## WILDLIFE HABITATS

Over-mature and neglected artificial habitats can gain in value for wildlife without being inherently sustainable. For example: neglected ponds eventually leak and silt up; over-mature trees eventually die; ruinous buildings fall. The precise value of Russborough to wildlife has not yet been surveyed in detail, but mature pond habitat, veteran trees and extensive range of nest sites including a heronry, probably create a site of more than local importance. By contrast, the improved pasture is of limited botanical interest, and no deadwood is left lying in the park.

### 2.7 CHANGES THROUGH THE CENTURIES

#### 1741 - LATE 1700s

According to Francis Leeson (1967):

*'Joseph Leeson, later the first earl of Milltown, purchased the Russellsborough Estate from John Graydon in 1741... He pulled down the old house at the latter place [Russellsborough] and had a magnificent new cut stone mansion designed by Richard Castle and Francis Bindon which is said to have taken 10 years to build.'*



Plate 31: The main staircase with its high-relief stuccowork

It is apparent that no expense was spared in the creation of this fine house. The *Georgian Society Record* Vol. 5 says: '...attention must be called to the wealth of mahogany, as regards doors, dados, architraves, and even an entire staircase' (Fitzgerald, 1913). Francis Leeson (1967) claims that: 'In fact, Russborough was the first house in Ireland in which West Indian Mahogany was used', although this is not confirmed. Marble was imported from Sicily and high relief stucco work was carried out by the Lafrancini family from Italy. Castle died in 1751, and items such as the Vernet paintings did not arrive at Russborough until this time, so it is likely that Bindon supervised much of the final embellishment; it is reported to have taken 15 years to complete.



Plate 30: Swans on the ornamental lake



Plate 32: Marble fireplace in the Tapestry Room

## 1798 AND AFTER THE REBELLION

During the Rebellion of 1798, the house was owned by the second Earl of Milltown (Joseph Leeson III). According to a report drawn up by the sixth Earl (Edward Nugent Leeson) quoted in the *Georgian Society Record* Vol. 5: 'The mansion successfully passed through the ordeal of the Rebellion in 1798...'. The report continues:

*'Far different was the conduct of the King's troops during their occupation, which took place without going through even the form of asking permission of the Lord Milltown (the second, then resident in Italy). They committed during their stay serious damage to the many works of art the house was filled with; pulled down roofs for firewood, cut down old timber for sentry-boxes, and left the outbuildings and offices, which they had found in perfect repair, little better than uninhabited ruins.'*

When the second Earl died in 1801, Russborough was inherited by his brother (Brice Leeson). According to the report, the third Earl 'petitioned the government for redress but instead of receiving compensation was asked for the taxes, which had accrued during the period his house thus was occupied'.

Given the time scale, it is unlikely that the third Earl managed to instigate any but minimal repairs to Russborough, as he died in 1807, leaving Russborough to his grandson, Joseph V.



Plate 33: The Hippodrome (background) and the Maze (foreground)

## 1810 - 1870s

Joseph, fourth Lord Milltown, was only eight years old when he inherited Russborough. According to Francis Leeson (1967):

*'The fourth Earl was much respected for his tenantry and was regarded in every sense as a resident Landlord, and good one... He was at one time a leading member of the Irish turf and owned the famous Racehorse, Foig-a-Ballagh.'*

It is highly likely that the Hippodrome or 'Riding School' was built during his tenure. The Ordnance Survey maps (Figures 5 – 7) would support this. They also indicate that the Walled Garden was laid out in its current form during this period.

The fourth Earl's son (Joseph Henry Leeson) succeeded to the title early in 1866 but died only five years later. Leeson (1967) refers to 'some Alterations to Russborough made by Monro in the time of Joseph Leeson, the fourth Earl...'. However it is not clear what form these alterations took, unless they included some of the alterations attributed to the works instigated by the sixth Earl in the 1870s.



Plate 34: Cast iron columns on the first-floor landing were clad to appear as marble

## 1870s TO 1900

Edward Nugent Leeson, the sixth Earl, married in 1871, shortly after he inherited the estate of Russborough from his brother. It is clear that substantial alterations were undertaken early in the sixth Earl's occupation of Russborough and possibly much may be attributed to his wife, Geraldine Evelyn Stanhope.

During the 1870s (according to the Dunphy, O'Connor, Baird Report, 1995), the following works took place:

- Provision of bathrooms, in particular those in the main block where the four corner bedrooms were remodeled to include en-suite bathrooms and dressing rooms.
- The construction of the passageway to the east of the main staircase linking the servery and the back stairs hall.
- Provision of the twin cast iron columns supporting the lantern light over the first floor landing.
- Replacement of the original sliding sashes by plate glass windows.
- Hanging of cut red/brown velvet in the saloon on the walls above dado level, which possibly may have replaced paneling. Similar velvet, which has not survived, was hung in other rooms.

## 1900 - 1950s

Geraldine Evelyn Stanhope, the sixth Earl's wife, lived in the house until her death in 1914. She had, however, already donated much of the Milltown Collection to the National Gallery of Ireland. *The Georgian Society Record* Vol. 5, 1913 says: 'To the right of the hall is the Library, now denuded of books...' (Fitzgerald, 1913). The Library described is the current Dining Room.

On the Countess' death, Russborough passed to the sixth Earl's nephew, Sir Edmund Turton. In *The Irish Heritage Series* No. 13, Sir Alfred Beit (1978) states:

*'Because of the first world war and the Irish troubles which followed, the Turtons made little use of the House, so it is something of a miracle that Russborough suffered no damage during those perilous times.'*



Plate 35: The façade of the West Pavilion

Sir Edmund Turton died in 1928. His widow sold the house to Captain Denis Bowes Daly in 1931.

The Dalys, by all accounts, maintained the house well. The article that appeared in *Country Life*, 23 January 1937, contains magnificent photographs of both the exterior and interior of the house.

Leeson (1967) says:

*‘Captain and Mrs Daly during their occupation carried out restoration work which went far towards the preservation of the house, but by 1952 the house was up for sale again, when it was described as kept in perfect repair and the lands most conscientiously farmed on modern lines.’*

## 1950s TO THE PRESENT TIME

Sir Alfred and Lady Beit acquired Russborough in 1952. According to their architects (Dunphy, O’Connor, Baird), extensive conservation, restoration and redecoration were undertaken, including the following:

- Glazing bars were fitted over the plate glass, creating the appearance of Georgian pane windows.
- Woodworm infestation in the timbers was treated.
- The cast iron columns to the first floor landing were clad to appear as marble.

As a result of damage to the chimney flue from the oil boiler in the basement, a fire in December 1965 set the north roof of the main house and the north bedrooms alight. The firemen cut through the roof and drenched the area, causing water damage to the saloon ceiling and floor. Bedroom 8 had to be completely refurbished. Fortunately, the plasterwork to the saloon ceiling stayed in place and only redecoration of the saloon, including re-sanding and polishing of the floor, was required.

Extensive changes were also made between 1976 and 1979 after the establishment of the Alfred Beit Foundation:

- The Stables which had until then occupied the western half of the West Pavilion at ground floor were converted into a kitchen and servery together with a staff sitting room and bedroom.
- The space above the Stables, part of which had been a granary, was converted to further staff accommodation.
- Additional bathrooms were added (assumed to be in the West Pavilion).
- The Kitchen in the East Pavilion was altered to form the café; adjoining rooms were converted to kitchen and staff toilets; the staff dining room was altered to become the house manager’s office.
- The single-storey visitors’ extension was erected behind the East Pavilion, including shop, public toilets and extension to the café.

### 3. THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RUSSBOROUGH

#### 3.1 THE ESTATE

Russborough is one of a declining number of relatively intact early 18th-century demesne landscapes. Its significance lies not only in the fact that it is a particularly fine example of such a landscape but also because its boundaries can be traced back to when it was originally purchased by Joseph Leeson from John Graydon in 1741. A remarkable continuity of ownership by the Leeson family, from its first design until the early part of the 20th century, also sets it apart from many contemporary demesnes.

#### 3.2 THE HOUSE

Russborough is widely considered to be one of the most beautiful examples of Palladian architecture surviving in Ireland today. It is relatively unaltered since it was originally built and, despite the passage of time, is in a remarkably good state of preservation.

One of a number of major country houses designed and built by the architect Richard Castle, it is imbued with significance from this perspective. Coming after both Carton and Powerscourt and embodying many of the features of both, Russborough can be viewed as a culmination of Castle's architectural talent and is perhaps his finest achievement.

Russborough is the only house dating from the early 18th century in the Blessington region. While a small number of late 18th-century country mansions are located around it, it stands out in terms of scale, design and attendant grounds. Nearby, the late 17th-century estate of Blessington Demesne can still be seen in relic form but there are few standing remains. However, just as Russborough is a very important example of a mid 18th-century demesne, so Blessington Demesne was a very significant late 17th-century example of Baroque landscape design. Thus Russborough, with Blessington Demesne and surviving medieval tower houses, forms part of a considerable historical nexus.

#### 3.3 THE DEMENSE

The significance of the designed landscape has been assessed against the internationally recognised criteria. It rates very highly and is without doubt of national importance.

Many of the original demesne features — including the grand entrance arch, field obelisks, Walled Garden, terracing and Ice House — still survive, as does a particularly fine example of a lime kiln. The full complement of estate offices and farm buildings in the east and west courtyards remains intact.

#### PERIOD/AGE

The park visibly represents a very early layout of its type (prior to 1760).



Plate 36: The Ice House — one of the original demesne features

## RARITY

It is a very rare example of a Palladian landscape only modestly altered since inception. The architect for the house, Richard Castle, carried through his ideas into the design of the landscape.

## DOCUMENTATION

The landscape at Russborough, as with many other Irish gardens, is poorly documented.

## GROUP VALUE

Russborough is one of a group of important surviving Irish Palladian houses; the landscape is of a piece with the house. The group of Irish Palladian houses, parks and associated art collections is arguably of significance to western European culture; Russborough ranks highly in this group.

## CONDITION

In some respects, the condition of the park is strikingly good given its age, with original trees — beech and lime — and extensive original earthworks and terracing. Although the landscape is eroded and neglected, it is largely unaltered in its most important aspects. However, part has been lost to gravel extraction and the wider designed landscape, and part of the inner demesne is now in separate ownership. Most damaging are two recently permitted developments in the northern end of the demesne. These will impact on the views and character of the core surviving landscape of importance, and will probably affect surviving features and archaeology, limiting the scope for long-term conservation and restoration.



Plate 37: Part of the landscape has been lost to gravel extraction

## EARLY OR INFLUENTIAL DESIGN

While very fine, the demense does not represent a particularly early or influential design.

## REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLE

Although Russborough is not an early example of Castle's work, it includes features in the landscape which do not survive at more than a handful of sites. In particular, it provides a proper setting for the Palladian villa — uncluttered with later development — so much so that some writers consider the landscape

unfinished. There is, however, no evidence to support this view. The landscape at Russborough could be the most representative surviving setting to a Palladian villa by Castle.

## DIVERSITY OF FEATURES

The demesne enjoys a modest diversity of features.

The late 19th/early 20th-century rhododendron and plantsman's gardens, including specimen trees, are of good quality and probably of regional importance, albeit not comparable with the national collections at Glasnevin, Birr Castle and Powerscourt.



Plate 38: The Rhododendron Garden

A small phase of early 19th-century garden design to the north elevation, including shrubbery and circular garden, has been superseded by later removals and modifications, thus decreasing the significance of this part of the demesne.

### 3.4 THE MILLTOWN AND BEIT COLLECTIONS

Russborough is the original home for the collection of the Earls of Milltown who were among the most distinguished families to undertake the Grand Tour. The collection was bequeathed to the National Gallery of Ireland in memory of the sixth and last Earl.

The 17 major paintings from the Beit Collection which were presented to the National Gallery of Ireland are among the most important group of Old Master paintings ever to have been donated to any art gallery in the 20th century. They have had an enormous effect in enriching the National Gallery of Ireland's collection. Some of these works are exhibited in Russborough during the tourist season.

The Beit Collection at Russborough is crucially important both in intrinsic value and in the fact that they remain in the building which was bought specifically to house them.

Thus, Russborough's significance is found both in its association with two internationally important families of collectors and its continuity as the home for the majority of works in the Beit Collection.

### 3.5 THE ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING COLLECTION

The collection of architectural drawings prepared since 1988 that are stored in the house is a comprehensive record of the building and recent alterations.

### 3.6 THE STATUES

The 12 classically inspired statues within the Doric colonnades form a composition unique in Ireland.

### 3.7 WILDLIFE HABITATS

The surviving parkland at Russborough is probably of local significance for several wildlife habitats, including the heronry. Subject to surveys and contextual information, the nesting, roosting and foraging use of the buildings and park by bats, swallows and house martins, together with invertebrates and veteran trees in the park, could be of regional importance.

### 3.8 THE VISITORS

Russborough today is a major attraction which brings in over 20,000 visitors per year, many of them from overseas. It carries an international reputation based on the quality of the estate, house and collections.



Plate 39: The West Colonnade



Plates 40 – 42: Some of the niche statues in the West Colonnade

## RUSSBOROUGH—STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUSSBOROUGH CAN  
BE SUMMARISED AS FOLLOWS:

- Russborough is one of the few surviving designed estates of the early 18th century which has enjoyed a remarkable continuity of ownership for most of its existence.
- It is the only remaining estate of such antiquity and scale in this part of the country.
- Russborough is one of Ireland's most beautiful examples of Palladian architecture, relatively unaltered since it was built, and in a remarkably good state of preservation.
- The house and designed landscape represent the culmination of the career of the architect, Richard Castle.
- Revealed as being of major national significance, the designed landscape and many of the original features of the demesne remain intact.
- This rare example of a Palladian landscape has been only modestly altered since its inception.
- Russborough's significance lies both in being the original home of the collection of the Earls of Milltown, which was subsequently bequeathed to the National Gallery, and the internationally important Beit Collection which was bequeathed to the Irish Nation
- Russborough is a major tourist resource, attracting approximately 20,000 visitors each year. Harnessing the potential of the landscape as well as the house and collections could see a substantial increase in this number.



## 4. ISSUES AFFECTING THE ESTATE TODAY

### 4.1 ISSUES AFFECTING THE INTEGRITY AND SETTING OF THE DEMESNE

#### STATUTORY PROTECTION

Although Russborough is a protected structure and there are general protection-based policies in the Wicklow County Development Plan, residential planning permission for a development within the original demesne wall was granted recently, thus illustrating a lack of protection for the integrity of the estate.

While the north/south prospect to and from Russborough is also protected in the County Development Plan, other crucial prospects from the south-east and south-west along the N81 are not protected. Future plans for the upgrading of the N81 also pose further threats to the integrity of the demesne wall.

#### BOUNDARIES

Encroaching developments both outside and within the demesne could lead to an increasing vulnerability of the estate boundaries. The greatest current risks arise from the separate ownership and permitted housing development at the northern end of the park. This is in clear view of the wilderness and north lawn, and includes part of the garden archaeology and some original trees.

The intrusion of the quarry has a significant effect on the overall integrity of the landscape, in particular on the approach from the south-west.

#### LAND OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

Land disposals (as above) within the demesne wall, along with the subsequent granting of planning permission, have degraded the original design of landscape. Such developments pose a potential threat.

#### FARMING

Tenancy agreements have not been revised in line with current landscape conservation practices and the use of the estate by visitors. Farm and land management practices are also causing damage, giving rise to various areas of concern.

- Farm machinery is damaging the main entrance and stone obelisk gates.
- If further areas of the grounds are opened up, problems might arise between the requirements for visitor access and farm animals.
- Livestock are trampling landscape and built features such as the Lime Kiln and Ice House. They are also compacting grazed areas and threatening surviving trees.
- Water supplies are experiencing eutrophication.
- Habitat and biodiversity are restricted.

## LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Although existing agricultural and woodland management has maintained the historic estate, it has not conserved all aspects of the designed landscape. The following are risk factors.

- Overstocking is damaging veteran trees and water features.
- Fencing, modern pump sheds and the loss of tree cover have an impact on the visual character.
- Block-planting across walks, drives and vistas which replaces original veteran trees may conflict with the originally complex visual layout.
- There is leakage from, or inappropriate repairs to, pond structures.
- Uninformed landscape restoration could remove important historic evidence and garden archaeology. It could also fail to reinstate the character and visual complexity of the original designs.
- The continued use of fertilisers and manures will affect water quality and the value of veteran trees for lichens, thereby reducing the potential for wildlife.
- Uninformed services and structural repairs could remove historic evidence and archaeology, or constrain future restoration work.
- Failure to initiate restoration works would lead to the continuing loss of historic evidence, character and habitat through veteran tree loss without accurate replacement.
- Any immediate implementation of restoration works before full surveys are completed would fail to take advantage of increasing expertise and knowledge, thus requiring the removal of veteran trees and undisturbed wildlife habitats before appropriate replacements are established.

## LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

The conservation of historic parks and gardens must respond to a number of characteristics which differentiate landscapes from buildings or archaeology. Some facets such as biological decay or erosion will affect buildings or archaeology. In landscapes, however, the following characteristics are dominant.

- *Biological growth and decline* of trees, shrubs, grass and flowers mean that certain factors can only be controlled by action such as active management, whether it be grazing, pruning or mowing. Buildings also require maintenance, but in the landscape, a default of management can have a very rapid effect that alters the entire character of the heritage asset. Many historic parks, as at Russborough, have an over-mature tree population which is a fundamental aspect of the site, but which cannot be sustained.
- *Geomorphological processes*, primarily siltation and erosion, impact on buildings or buried archaeology; again, this is a matter of time, scale and magnitude of effect. As practised a century ago, the widespread abandonment of annual flushing from designed lakes and ponds has led to the need for large-scale and potentially disruptive desilting using modern machinery.

- The *aesthetic design* rationale is dominant, so designed landscapes have very little scope for productive adaptive re-use without impact on their essential characteristics. Parks may be maintained agriculturally, but conservation of a historic park requires techniques different from those used by modern mechanised agriculture.
- *Modern perceptions* have tended to view landscapes as natural, implying that they can be appreciated free-of-charge. Archaeology, meanwhile, has been regarded as either a fixed constraint or an opportunity for excavation, whereas buildings are useful, capable of re-use, and known to be expensive to maintain. Preconceived ideas about resource allocation limit what can be achieved in landscapes.
- The ‘*Secret Garden*’ effect: It is often the most neglected or abandoned parks and gardens which have the greatest aesthetic and emotional power. Conservation must respond to modern perceptions of the landscape which might be entirely at odds with an original design, resulting from the processes of growth and decay. Conservation ‘as found’ might be appropriate for many such sites, although intervention may be necessary at some stage to arrest the loss of fundamental features, such as the potentially catastrophic impact of tree roots on a dam embankment.
- Most (but not all) landscapes are *palimpsests*, with several layers of design. Conservation of the last *complete phase* may well be the most appropriate, just as it is widely adopted for buildings. Restoration to a defined early date now tends to be limited to specific circumstances, for example: where resources allow; later phases are of low significance; intervention is unavoidable; early evidence is dependable; and recreation is acceptable. However, more detailed discussion is required to reach a consensus on restoration.



## 4.2 ISSUES AFFECTING THE HOUSE

### EXTERNAL

#### ROOFS

Although there are some areas of artificial slate on the main roof, roof finishes are generally of thick natural slate, graded in width and length. While this is very attractive, the slates are difficult to re-use and almost impossible to match from a salvaged source.

Roof coverings are in very poor condition, with constant slippage of slates on the very exposed faces of the main building and the two pavilions. There have been many ineffective repairs, with a continual reliance on buckets and other containers placed in strategic locations within the roof space. Roof gutters, parapets and flashings are all in poor condition.

The rafter ends at all parapet gutters are likely to be affected by rot. Some areas were investigated previously but it is not clear how extensive the rot was nor the extent of the repairs.

#### THE MAIN ROOF

There is a central valley containing a roof lantern and four chimneys. The chimneys are of an unusual construction, being arched above the roof space due to the layout of the rooms below. The flaunching around the tops of the chimneys is in poor condition.

There are many slipped slates (Dunphy, O'Connor, Baird, 1995). The roof lantern at the centre of the roof has been reslated recently using artificial slates. Water ingress at the roof lantern is seen as recent staining to the ceiling. It is likely that there is timber rot damage in the main beams in this area as well as valley boards etc. There is much moss, algae and lichen growing over the slates and parapet walls.



Plate 43: A general view of the main roof



Plate 44: Urns on the main roof



Plate 45: The double-pitched roof of the West Colonnade



Plate 46: Water damage in a first-floor bedroom

## WEST PAVILION ROOF

The main roof over the West Pavilion has a parapet gutter around the east, south and west wall heads, as well as a central valley and two chimney stacks. The roof over the Colonnade is double-pitched with a central valley. Copper flashing has been used in areas. Slates are generally slipped (Dunphy, O'Connor, Baird, 1995). The gully outlet which drains the central valley is blocked, leading to water damage in the corridor below. The chimney to the west is in poor condition, with open joints and damaged flashing.

Although the parapet gutter is in reasonable condition, it is letting water in and causing damage in a first-floor bedroom. The parapet has been repaired using a metal strip, but this is lifting slightly and does not appear to have been well applied. Lead flashing near the top of the parapet wall also appears to be directing water towards the interior of the wall. There is a considerable lean to the south parapet of the West Pavilion.

## EAST PAVILION ROOF

The roof is similar in construction to that over the West Pavilion, apart from the insertion of blind windows in the central valley area. There is a large flat roof over the newer extension housing the Visitors' Centre. Water is ponding in many areas over this roof.

The older roof is in poor condition. Many slates have slipped or are missing, especially a large area in the newer slates over the Colonnade. There is debris in many of the valley gutters and gutter outlets appear to be blocked. Rusted metal flashing over the roof at the junction of the Colonnade and central block is cracked in areas. Vegetation is growing from the chimney flashings; large areas of stone have ruptured due to the corrosion of embedded metal fixings.



Plate 47: Ponding occurs on the flat roof of the Visitors' Centre

## CHIMNEYS

In conjunction with re-roofing, necessary repairs to chimneys should be carried out. Of all the chimneys, the west chimney of the West Pavilion requires the most urgent attention.

## RAINWATER GOODS AND DRAINAGE

There are no external rainwater goods on the Main House as all drainage is through internal downpipes. The many internal rainwater pipes, often buried within the structure and of unknown condition, represent a considerable risk to the fabric.

Exterior rainwater goods on the East and West Pavilions are causing corrosion in numerous locations. Vegetation may be blocking some gutters on the north elevation of the West Wing.

## WALLS

The external walls of the house are constructed in a high mica granite from the local Golden Hill quarry. (For Condition Survey, see Appendix III.)

The granite is weathering slowly by granular disintegration. A more intense form of weathering occurs in localised areas around the main door on the south elevation where areas of the granite are scaling, causing outer layers to detach. This has probably been exacerbated by the use of dense cementitious pointing around the affected stone.

Spalling of stonework was noted in isolated locations.

Some chipping of the stone was noted, especially around the entablature areas.

Structural cracks (e.g. east elevation, West Pavilion) have cut through several granite blocks as a result of historic settlement and have previously been poorly repointed using a reddish mortar mix.

The lower edge of the entablature over the colonnades has been formed from granite blocks. The central block in each bay appears to be unsupported and may be sagging. Past repairs have been carried out in this area.

## BIOLOGICAL GROWTH

Biological growth in joints — in the form of lichen, algae or moss — is evident on all elevations of the building, including the roof slates. This is particularly noticeable on the north elevation which is sheltered from direct sunlight and therefore remains more damp. Window sills and other horizontal surfaces also remain damp, increasing biological growth in these areas.

Creepers have been trained over wire on the rear of the West Pavilion (Anne's Garden). They are separated from the walls of the building to some extent, but their roots appear to be fairly mature and are close to the base of the wall. This may lead to damage of the foundations. In addition, the roots of the Wellingtonia tree are undermining the rear wall in the West Courtyard.

## POINTING

Pointing has been lost in a number of locations, most noticeably in exposed locations such as the entablature or the corners. In areas of high moisture, such as the steps of the south elevation of the Main House, pointing has been lost from all joints.



Plate 48: Scaling of granite around the main entrance door on the south elevation

## MORTAR REPAIRS

Some small areas of chipped or missing stonework have been repaired with a cementitious mortar, as have some areas of open joints and cracking, such as on the south elevation of the Main House. These cementitious mortars can be impermeable and may cause water vapour to move through surrounding stones rather than through the joints. This can lead to salt and frost damage to the stone.

## RENDERED AREAS

On the east elevation of the East Pavilion, three different types of render have been applied; this detracts from the appearance of the building, and one area is attracting biological growth. All the render appears to be cementitious which, due to its impermeability, may also lead to internal damp problems.

Some windows to the rear of the building have infill panels within the exterior window surrounds. These have also been covered in a cementitious render.

The rear of the West Pavilion has been rendered with a roughcast mix, presumably contemporary with the construction of Anne's Garden (1933). This is cracking and delaminating in areas around the curved wall and at the junction of the West Pavilion and the Colonnade. Other areas appear to have been patched.



Plate 49: Anne's Garden viewed from above



Plate 50: Vegetation on the walls surrounding Anne's Garden has damaged the render

## METAL FIXINGS TO PAVILIONS

Metal fixings have been inserted within the masonry, corresponding to the positions of downpipes on the pavilion walls. These are rusting, causing staining to the surrounding stonework. If left on the building, these metal fittings are likely to expand and damage the stone.

## URNS AND STATUES

The urns have been carved from a soft sandstone which has weathered heavily in some areas, causing spalling and damage. Three from the roof of the Main House are missing, detracting from the appearance of the façades. Others are in poor condition and may be unsafe. Two urns have been removed and are now lying in the parapet gutter. A previous report on the condition of the urns was prepared by Dunphy, O'Connor, Baird (June 1996).

The marble statues have been repaired in places with a hard mortar mix. Several are suffering from minor chipping.

## WINDOWS

Many windows are in need of repair and/or replacement. Some are in a poor condition or decayed, allowing water ingress into the interior of the building. Others are too delicate for commercial cleaning operations. There are no draught control systems.

## INTERNAL



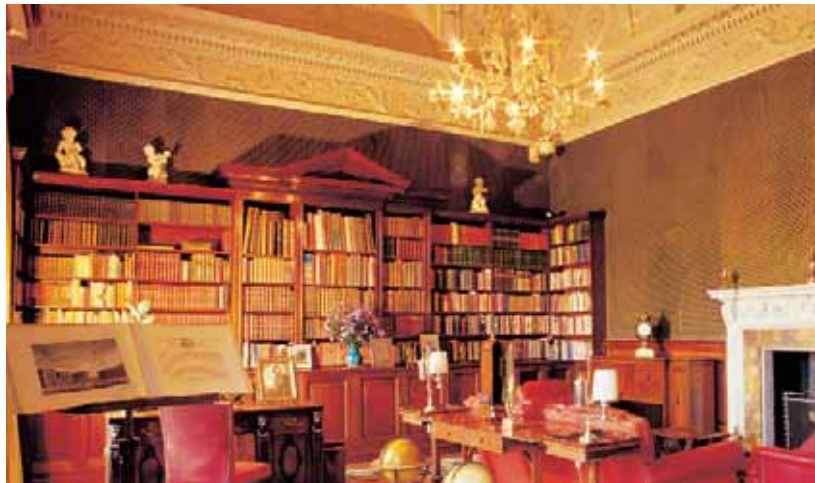
Plates 51 and 52: The Tapestry Room and its plasterwork ceiling

## WALLS AND CEILINGS

The ceiling and wall plaster is cracked in many areas throughout the house. In most cases, these are historical faults associated with use of the building and possibly slow settlement. Although much of the cracking is superficial, it would be important to investigate the integrity of the key of the lath and plaster of the more decorative ceilings from the rooms above. Many large cracks were noted during the 1995 survey and do not appear to have worsened during the intervening years. Some cracks have



been noted since that time, especially over the ceilings in the Entrance Hall and in the Tapestry Room. Further investigation is required as cracks in decorative ceilings could indicate overstressing due to their weight. There are generally cracks up the corners of coved ceilings on the first floor. Plasterwork has also been affected by salt damage due to dampness.



Plates 53 and 54: The Library, with a detail of its ornate ceiling

## WATER INGRESS, DAMP STAINING, RISING DAMP AND CONDENSATION

Water ingress is evident in a number of locations, particularly in the Library and First Floor Hall. This needs to be investigated to determine causes.

Staining is obvious on the east side of the coved ceiling in the Library. (This may be recent, as it was not recorded during the 1995 survey.) The two bathrooms above this point are the probable source of this staining, although water services on the first floor have now been drained down. The bathroom areas have important tiled floors (and even more important ceilings below) which do not allow access for repairing joists. It must be assumed that the joist ends in these areas are equally affected by water ingress.

There is evidence of long-term water penetration on the south façade of the main block; 80% of joist ends have been repaired previously.

Another area of water staining is visible around the supporting timbers of the cupola in the Upper Hall. Staining extends across to the concealed rainwater pipe beside the door to Bedroom 9.

Damp problems caused by roof defects exist along the south wall of the West Pavilion, where both Sir Alfred's bedroom and the staff bedroom are affected. Damage in the former is particularly severe. It was reported that damage to roof timbers in the staff bedroom had been repaired in 1995, so the existing staining could be due to the slow drying of the wall in this area.

There is general evidence of rising damp throughout the basement. Although larger areas of damp were noted as being due to rising damp (Dunphy, O'Connor, Baird, 1995), this may be due to poor detailing around the front steps and to drainage faults. Rising damp has caused the spalling of some areas of plaster at the bases of the wall, but in general this does not appear severe.

The large Wine Cellar in the basement is affected by severe condensation on its external wall; its cause should be determined and remedied. Salts are evident on this wall, indicating some level of damage to the wall plaster. This does not appear to affect the corresponding wall in the boiler room next door.

## TIMBER

Localised areas of timber have been affected variously by decay, insect damage and mechanical damage.

Several windows show small areas of wet rot in their lower timbers (*e.g.* West Pavilion south-facing windows; cupola windows over the Upper Hall). Lower timbers are affected as water runs down the windows and lies in these areas, leading to decay.

Several small fruiting bodies of cellar rot (*Coniophora puteana*) are visible in the small Wine Cellar. The mycelium of the fungus extends across the vaulted ceiling. The fungus is dry, however, and is therefore dead. Concealed fixing timbers within the ceiling may have been decayed.

Decay due to wood-boring insects was located in several areas. Furniture beetles were found in large quantities on the window sill and bed in the West Pavilion, Bedroom WG9. The source of this infestation has not been located, but it is probable that the insects have emerged from furniture within the room.

Furniture beetle frass was found in the decayed window frame in Sir Alfred Beit's bedroom. This area is currently suffering from water ingress due to faults in the parapet gutter above; it is likely that insect or fungal decay will have affected concealed wall plate or joist ends in this area.

Furniture beetle and weevils have destroyed cupboards in some basement rooms. Some are in contact with the damp walls of the basement and have probably been decayed slightly by wet rot. No active fungal decay was located. There is an area of severe damp in the north corner of Basement Room 11.

All the bedrooms in the main house (with the exception of Room 5) are panelled. The panelling is cracking in many areas along joints and grains, probably as a result of temperature fluctuations. Panelling on the south wall appears to have been affected more as a result of higher temperatures due to solar gain.

There are parquet floors throughout the ground floor of the main house. Joints in these have generally opened and the blocks are uneven in areas.

Shutters on the ground floor of the main house have suffered mechanical damage. This is probably caused when the metal bars on the rear of the shutters are knocked repeatedly when opening and closing.

## WALLS AND FLOORS

The first-floor landing walls (those to the south and north under the roof lantern) are formed of braced timber studwork, originally in-filled with brick. The walls not only support the main roof, but also some of the roof lantern and the first floor. According to the records, a steel beam was inserted at high level in the north side wall in the 1950s. Work to the south wall was undertaken in 1989 when the brick in-fills were removed and some strengthening to timber connections was carried out.

There are significant problems of water ingress to external walls, particularly on south and west elevations, resulting in wet rot to first-floor joist ends.

Extensive repairs have been carried out to joist ends, except under the bathroom floors.

There is excessive spring in the first floor. Joists are undersized and the floor is likely to have lost some of its stiffness because of previous services installations and deterioration of the timbers. A previous proposal to install catenary wires was considered to be too expensive and disruptive.

## STAIRS

Due to concerns about its capacity and the possibility of damage, the main staircase is not used for visitors at present. It would be desirable if it were used as a feature of any visitor access.

Unightly and intrusive steel supports under the service stairs were inserted to counter the potential effects of visitor use.

## INTERNAL STONEMWORK

There are several stone elements in the interior of the house: steps, flagstones, granite columns and mantelpieces. As wear to stone steps is a sign of age, it should be respected unless it affects safety.

There are open joints between the flagstones along the back stairs and its associated corridor. These have been poorly repointed with a cementitious mortar.

The back stairs are worn and some nosings are chipped. Stairs to the basement have suffered similar damage. In addition, the edges of the steps are badly cracked and chipped, and some pieces have been lost. Damage to step nosings may be a trip hazard.

There are granite columns in some ground floor rooms; the one in the West Pavilion is associated with the original kitchen and staff accommodation. The surface of one column has been painted and is spalling near ground level. Pointing in the joints of other columns is loose. The column in the staff sitting room is quite heavily rust stained.

Chimneypieces throughout the building are important and are generally in good condition. However, the mantelpiece in the Drawing Room has separated from the wall.

#### 4.3 ISSUES RELATING TO SERVICES INSTALLATIONS, SAFETY AND SECURITY

##### GENERAL

The existing services installations have been surveyed for their condition in relation to current codes, their adequacy in functioning within a protected building with conservation requirements, and their costs in use, including maintenance and running costs.

##### HEATING

The heating systems are oil fired. There are two boiler houses — one feeding the West Pavilion located in the West Courtyard, and one feeding the main house which is located in the entrance courtyard outhouses. The boilers (with the exception of a burner on the main house boiler) are old and inefficient.

There is asbestos insulation on main pipework routes throughout the basement of the main house. This is labelled and has been sealed. Any alteration works will necessitate expensive advance asbestos removal work.

Heating pipework distribution is in mild steel pipework. The pipework is routed at high level within the basement of the main building. Although run neatly, this route is inappropriate and limits the use of this space in terms of public access. Other pipework runs beneath existing floor boards, with visible vertical risers in places. The condition of the pipework cannot be ascertained without opening-up works. No leaks have been reported in recent times by the building's occupiers.

There is little or no control on the radiators within the buildings. Heating controls and zoning are minimal, and thus the system is wasteful of energy. The basic boiler controls and lack of thermostatic radiator valves (some are showing signs of rust) mean that radiators continue to operate regardless of room temperature once the boilers are on. Rooms can therefore overheat and heating costs are higher than necessary. In addition, lack of control of heating within the spaces may damage materials on display in the building. This needs to be reviewed as part of the Collection conservation strategy (mentioned further under Ventilation, below).

Large single-glazed areas throughout the building contribute to high heat loss. The roof void appears to be largely un-insulated. With minimal insulation measures, heat losses are largely uncontrolled. No energy efficiency measures have been undertaken.



Plate 55: The mantelpiece in the Drawing Room has separated from the wall

## WATER SERVICES

Detailed descriptions of the water services which feed the buildings can be found in two documents — a letter dated 19 November 1999 from Dermot Rice of Dunphy, O’ Connor, Baird to William Finlay; and a progress report on the water supply dated 15 May 2000.

Drinking water for the house is provided from the well located beneath the pump house behind the rear pond. The well water supply runs to a distribution header in the entrance courtyard boiler house, which distributes this supply throughout the building.

In addition to the well supply, two streams (the main stream which originates at a spring in the wood and a subsidiary stream of unknown source) feed a storage tank on the opposite side of the road to the main Russborough site. From this tank, a piped overflow crosses the road and runs towards a further spring. The water supply from the tank crosses the road and runs to a filter bed. The overflow from the filter bed runs to the small pond at the rear of the house (which in turn overflows to the bottom lake). The supply from the filter bed feeds drinking water troughs for the animals as it feeds through the site. The supply then runs to the main water distribution header in the boiler room, onto which it feeds via an ultra-violet steriliser. This tops up the well supply.

The front and rear ponds are considered to be stand-by supplies for the fire brigade. However, the unsightly large blue tank at the rear of the building is the main fire-fighting supply. There are two fire hose reels in the main building.

In the West Pavilion, there is a large storage tank in the attic space which is accessed from the stairs. There are further storage tanks in the roof of the main building.

Hot water for the West Pavilion is provided by a calorifier located within the boiler room. This cylinder is very large for day-to-day needs and is likely to be uneconomical to run.

To prevent the possibility of water damage to ceilings and paintings/fabrics at ground level, all first-floor bathrooms have been drained down and the water supplies have been isolated. Water damage to the Library ceiling is thought to be the result of earlier leaks from the bathroom above.

## SOILS AND WASTE SYSTEMS

Ground water is vulnerable to effluent from the current sewage disposal system. Above-ground soils and wastes are run in a mixture of cast iron and uPVC. The foul drainage runs to a conventional septic tank. To date, no problems have been recorded with the septic tank.

There is reported flooding from the area of the Maze into the Hippodrome and onwards into the East Courtyard and coach park. In addition, a stream from the East Courtyard that runs under the East Pavilion may be the cause of damp problems to the kitchen area walls.

Two septic tanks are situated between the Main House and the front pond. It is unlikely that a proper percolation area is installed. As there is no record of the tanks being de-sludged, they are unlikely to comply with current regulations, making ground water vulnerable to effluent from the current sewage disposal system.

## VENTILATION

Solar shading, as well as temperature and humidity stability, are critical to the conservation of the Collections. In general, however, ventilation is via opening windows. The environmental control which this affords is inadequate for the conservation of the materials within some rooms.

Mechanically ventilated spaces, including kitchens, are largely inadequately ventilated.

There is no fire suppression system in the café extract.

Open fireplaces throughout the building are rarely used, except for one in the West Pavilion. With large single-glazed areas which are not well sealed, high heat losses occur via gaps around the glazing frames, leading to a lack of control in environmental conditions. Nesting birds are also causing problems in chimneys.

The Strong Room off the East Colonnade hall has experienced mould growth and is still musty. Two vents have been installed at a high level in the room, providing a link through to the corridor where a radiator is left on outside. While this has improved the situation, further measures are needed to prevent deterioration of objects stored in this area.

As County Wicklow is now recognised as an area of high Radon levels, this should influence the ventilation strategy for the entire building.

## POWER SUPPLY

The building was rewired within the past ten years, and there is a basic distribution of sockets throughout the buildings. Cabling is a mixture of old and new. Some circuits are not protected by ELCBs, as required under current ETCI regulations.

## LIGHTING

There are picture lights above most of the paintings — these are provided so that visitors can view the paintings from the aisles. However, some rooms such as the Drawing Room and Tapestry Room are inadequately lit, making it difficult to see the paintings. The Dining Room has no central light pendant.



Plate 56: The Dining Room



Plate 57: Stables in the West Courtyard

Emergency lighting is provided for public spaces, but in general this is in self-contained fittings which would not meet current recommendations. Emergency exit signs are fed by MICC cabling. There is a central test panel for emergency lighting within the main panel in the basement.

## FIRE ALARM

The main building has an automatic smoke detection system. However, the degree of cover is inadequate, particularly to the West Wing.

## SECURITY/ACCESS CONTROL

While there has been continuing review and upgrading, the security system has not been reviewed comprehensively since 1990.

Although the security system was considered during the survey, it is not reproduced here.

## LIGHTNING PROTECTION

The building has no lightning protection.

## TELEPHONE SYSTEM

Incoming overhead telephone lines (these are visually intrusive) supply a basic telephone system. There are a number of direct lines serving office/reception, the West Pavilion and public telephones in the main building.

### 4.4 ISSUES AFFECTING THE COLLECTIONS

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Russborough does not offer certainty or measurement of stable environmental conditions recommended for high-quality collections.

## EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

There is no disaster plan in line with current international practice, including content rescue priority lists or volunteer call-out procedures.

## RECORD DRAWINGS AND DOCUMENTATION

The substantial collection of original drawings prepared by Dunphy, O'Connor, Baird since 1952, as well as the Beit Collection Catalogues and much important paperwork pertaining to the house, are kept in the house itself. No second copy is kept in a secure alternative venue.

## EXHIBITIONS

Andrew O'Connor of the National Gallery has reported that extensive work would be required in areas of security and environmental control to open up the possibility of loans of important pictures. The principal Beit and Milltown pictures would only be allowed to return to the house in exceptional circumstances.

## RESEARCH

There is room for further research on both the Milltown and Beit Collections. While individual items such as the Vermeer are extensively documented, work on the Collections, as collections, is limited.

## MERCHANDISING

The Collections and the house itself offer valuable merchandising opportunities. Copyright issues are not clear.

### 4.5 ISSUES AFFECTING OTHER ESTATE FEATURES

#### WEST COURTYARD AND FARMYARD BUILDINGS

Buildings in the West Courtyard and farmyards are deteriorating from lack of maintenance. Some have been inappropriately altered and many are of low architectural significance. Most are now unused.

#### EAST COURTYARD BUILDINGS

While buildings in the East Courtyard are in better order than those in the West Courtyard, many are unused and starting to deteriorate. Although there are many inappropriate alterations, the essential character remains.

The walls of the Old Boiler House are roughcast and in good condition. The roof is slated with large slates, many of which have slipped; temporary repairs are evident. There is no gully at the base of the downpipe.

The curved, corrugated metal roof of the Boiler House/Pottery Studio has been patched in areas. The walls are roughcast and are cracked at ground level towards the west end. The windows are metal; the most easterly window is badly corroded. The hopper appears to be blocked as overflow staining is visible on the wall.

In the Steward's Quarters, the west elevation walls are roughcast and in reasonable condition, except for isolated areas of damage to the south of the arch and around the third first-floor window from the south. The granite surrounds around the arch and several of the ground floor windows are in reasonable condition, although one of the voussoirs in the arch is cracked. There is loss of surface to some of the stones close to ground level. The undersurface of the archway is vaulted and in good condition. There is some cracking to the render close to ground level. The walls of the east elevation are also roughcast and in reasonable condition, although there is staining in some areas. Breeze blocks have been used to form a doorway around the arch. There is heavy moss growth along the top of the concrete plinth at the base of the wall. The render of the north chimney is badly cracked and mastic has been used in an attempt to repair these cracks. There is an area of rust staining. The south chimney is also rendered but is in good condition.

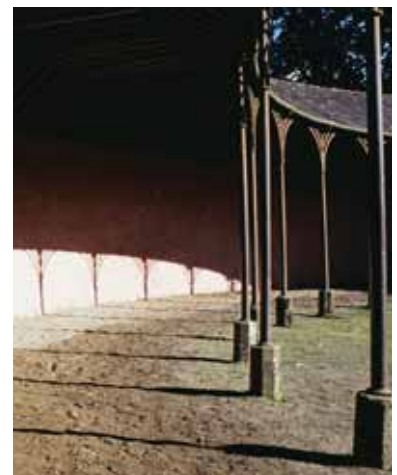
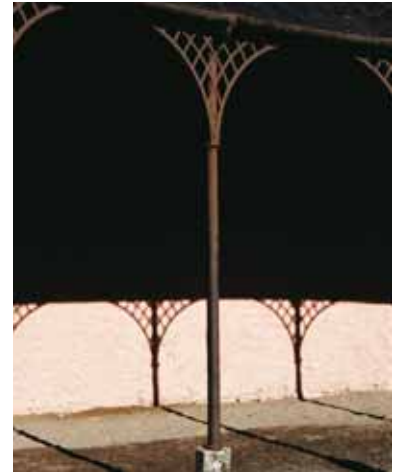


Plate 58 and 59: The cast iron columns in the Hippodrome

## HIPPODROME

The Hippodrome or ‘Riding School’ is a highly significant structure which is underused at present and in poor condition. Modest in size, about 100 feet (30 metres) in diameter, it is a simple circular construction with a rendered random stone rubble outer wall, and a double-pitched slate roof over the perimeter of 10 feet (3 metres). Exquisite, simply detailed, inner cast iron columns double as rainwater downpipes which issue through their granite bases.

The roof is covered with small slates, many of which are slipped or missing. Slates are lying in the guttering around the interior of the Hippodrome. There is biological growth over the roof and moss is growing in the joints of the ridge tiles. The roof timbers are new and appear to have been pre-treated. Metal columns are rusting.

## GATES AND PILLARS

Motor vehicles have caused impact damage to almost all of the significant gateways, fences and obelisk pillars.

Although the entrance gates are generally in reasonable condition, they suffer from open joints (particularly at ground and cornice levels), some chipping (damage from coaches), and biological growth and vegetation.

### 4.6

## VISITOR MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The aim of the Alfred Beit Foundation is to maintain and enhance Russborough. Following the establishment of the Foundation in 1976, the house was opened to the public in 1978.

Since inappropriate visitor management practices can have an effect on the integrity of any historic place, their overall impact must be carefully considered. Although visitors are essential to sustaining Russborough, they have directly and indirectly led to a loss of integrity:

- The modern Visitor Services building is intrusive.
- Steelwork inserted under rear staircase is also intrusive.
- Car parking is causing congestion in the East Courtyards and the approach drive.

## PUBLIC ACCESS

With access by guided tour only, tourists may visit the main rooms, the bedrooms and the silver/porcelain collection. They may also take part in special events. With approximately 20,000 visitors per year, other attractions include the Maze, a small children’s playground in the former Hippodrome, and a café which can only be used when the house is open. Despite the estate’s potential, there is a narrow focus to the visitor attractions. Features such as the Walled Garden, Lady’s Island and the path network receive no special promotion, and most of the buildings are under-used.

Public use of the house brings with it a range of statutory requirements covering areas such as disabled access, toilet facilities and fire safety measures. At present, there is no disabled access to the ground floor of the central block, first floor or the basement.



Plate 60: The archway into the West Courtyard



Plate 61: Field obelisks

## VISITOR ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

At present, all visitors enter through the main (Triumphal Arch) entrance. They then proceed through the middle East Courtyard (past oil tanks and boilerhouse) and into the inner East Courtyard with its modern, flat-roofed Visitor Services wing containing reception, shop, toilets and café. On payment, visitors receive a time for their tour and can wait in the café and or/shop until their tour starts. The tour commences with a short introductory video in the East Colonnade.

There is little visitor information at this point. With no detailed Visitor Survey information, it is difficult to determine visitor patterns or impressions of their visit. In addition, there is no information about whether the house itself is being adversely affected by visitor numbers or what its carrying capacities are.

## TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Retaining the importance of surviving formal landscape features — including the banks which line the approach drive — restricts the development of car parking and vehicle circulation between entrance areas and the house. A comprehensive and sensitive solution is therefore required.

At present, car parking is in the middle and outer East Courtyards, with overflow parking along the main driveway. Parking in these areas is intrusive, becoming extremely congested at peak times.

Coaches (especially larger, modern coaches) have great difficulty gaining access to the site through the main entrance arch. As a result, the main gate has suffered impact damage from vehicles and is at serious risk. Problems with negotiating the entrance also mean that some coach operators are going elsewhere and bypassing Russborough. Lack of signage at the main road may be adding to this.

### 4.7 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

## STAFF RESOURCES

The Conservation Plan team has noted with admiration the commitment, expertise and knowledge of the current staff. However, staff resources are so stretched with day-to-day management that no time has been allocated to the preparation of written records, manuals or documents for monitoring and managing the house.

## FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The accounts clearly show that income is not keeping pace with annual running costs (even when building repairs are excluded). In spite of a modest increase in visitor income, overhead costs such as salaries, insurance and security have risen dramatically. It is clear that the Foundation has been drawing on its reserves and investments: this is clearly not sustainable in the longer term.



Plates 62, 63 and 64: The Visitors' Experience: Making their way from the car park to the house, visitors walk past oil tanks and through a plain metal doorway

## 5. POLICIES

### POLICIES RELATING TO THE INTEGRITY AND SETTING OF THE DEMESNE

#### 5.1 OVERALL POLICY

The overall policy is to retain, restore and enhance the integrity and significance of Russborough in its entirety, in line with international conservation charters — specifically the ICOMOS Burra and Venice Charters.

All existing and proposed uses for, and works to, Russborough should be measured against their potential for negative impact on the integrity and significance of the Historic Place.

#### 5.2 STATUTORY PROTECTION

The Alfred Beit Foundation should make representations for increased statutory protection for Russborough in the Wicklow County Development Plan with specific reference to the following:

- Land within demesne wall should be protected from development.
- Lands between Russborough and the reservoir should be protected from development.
- Prospects of house and entrance gate from south-east, and the prospect from south-west, should be added to the existing main southerly prospect and given protection from development.
- The importance of the treed landscape should be recognised, as should the need for policies for the conservation and management of all trees within the original demesne boundary wall.
- There should be protection against threats from future strategic road improvements.

#### 5.3 BOUNDARIES

The overall policy is to maintain and restore the integrity of the designed landscape. Initially, the landscape should be conserved as found, ameliorating modern developments by screening appropriate to the historic design. At the same time, the potential of the long-term restoration of the historic landscape must be protected.

The Foundation should seek to secure, by ownership or designation, the wider designed landscape as the setting and outlook for the house, gardens and park.

Protection of the boundaries of the historic, designed landscape within the demesne wall should be achieved in the following ways:

- Where possible, re-purchase land previously sold, particularly the area of land to the north-west of the house, extending to the edge of wilderness visible from the north side of the house.
- If it is not possible to re-purchase, screen sites where planning permission has been given recently.
- Restore the quarry area.
- Ensure that other owners of sections of demesne wall and demesne land are made aware of the significance of the integrity of the site.
- Overhead electricity and telephone supplies should be relocated underground as resources permit, thus restoring the integrity of the designed landscape.

#### 5.4 FARMING

The Foundation should undertake a review of all land tenancies and associated farming practices to:

- avoid the risk of further physical damage to estate structures from farm machinery.
- minimise the impact of farming practices on the character and atmosphere of Russborough.
- avoid damage to landscape features and habitats by *e.g.* livestock trampling and eutrophication.

#### 5.5 LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

- *Maximise* the longevity of veteran parkland and specimen trees by avoiding overgrazing and poaching (compaction) which reduces drainage and aeration of the ground.
- *Conserve* areas of historic trees from *c.* 1750 or subsequent deliberate designed phases to standards outlined in Appendix IV.
- *Conserve* the wildlife interest of the historic landscape through management (protecting veteran trees, reducing eutrophication of the parkland grass and lakes) and protection (retain nesting and roosting sites for hirundines, heronry, swans, bats; phasing of restoration works). Detailed habitat surveys should be initiated.
- *Manage* the lower lakes in accordance with the early historic record, with managed coppice and pollarded willows for wildlife, but removal of modern intrusive planting at the north end. Repair dam embankment, water supply, water cascades, stabilise pond sides and clean out on a phased programme.

#### 5.6 LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

Restoration and conservation of the designed landscape should be subject to a comprehensive Historic Landscape Survey and Restoration Plan. These should set out, in full, the historic research survey analysis, objectives, proposals, and implementation supported by documented conservation decisions and statements, with archaeological investigations as appropriate.

- Replanting of trees should be carried out in accordance with the historic record (including Rocque, estate map, and Ordnance Surveys of 1839 and 1886), and based on a detailed understanding of the historic layout, including prior archaeological survey.
- The wilderness/upper lawn formal woodland should be restored.
- Restore the north lawn, including surviving formal pool, and retain all surviving 18th-century fabric and features.

## POLICIES RELATING TO THE MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR OF THE BUILT FABRIC OF THE HOUSE

### 5.7 ARCHITECTURAL INTEGRITY

The architectural integrity of the house should be restored as resources and practicalities permit. Particular issues highlighted during the Study include these.

- Remove existing visitor services building.
- Remove inserted steelwork support to rear staircase.
- Remove inserted columns to first floor central landing, in conjunction with roof repairs.
- Re-slating of the roof should be carried out in phases, ensuring that salvaged original graded slates are used as a priority on the main south elevations, with salvaged or new slates to the best achievable match used on hidden or rear elevations.

### 5.8 PROGRAMME OF REPAIRS

A planned programme of repairs on a priority basis is required. (Recommendations for prioritisation of repairs and other works are included in Appendix III.)

### 5.9 SUPERVISION

No work should be carried out unless under the supervision of personnel with appropriate qualifications and expertise in the conservation of historic buildings.

### 5.10 COMPLIANCE

All work should be carried out in full compliance with current standards and regulations, amended if necessary, in agreement with the relevant statutory bodies. Additionally, all work must be compatible with preserving the integrity of the historic character of the house and other structures.

### 5.11 FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

Conservation and repair measures should always be based on a thorough understanding of the decay causes and mechanisms. To this end, further detailed investigations and studies should be undertaken:

- Boroscope investigation of inaccessible first floor (bathroom areas) of central block.
- Mortar analysis to ensure compatible match.
- Monitor plaster cracking in decorative ceilings to Entrance Hall and Tapestry Room.
- A full assessment of the lean to the south parapet of the West Pavilion, including the condition of the current strapping.
- Investigate sourcing of slates and/or analysis of their composition.
- Carrying capacities of both stairs to central block.
- Source of (historic?) water ingress in the Library ceiling.
- Repair strategies for external fabric restoration to prevent water ingress.
- Further investigation of the roof around the central lantern light to inform repair strategy.
- Investigate locations and condition of internal rainwater pipes.
- Investigate lines and condition of underground drainage and causes of flooding in East Courtyard.
- A repair strategy is needed which will provide a rationale for conservation/replacement of spalled and weathered external stone, pointing and associated external elements. The colour/type of granite used for indents and replacement needs to be carefully selected and sourced.

#### 5.12 PROVISION OF CONSERVATION EXPERTISE

An appropriately qualified and experienced conservation architect should be appointed to oversee all works, manage the professional team, provide advice to staff and Trustees, and carry out annual maintenance checks and quinquennial surveys.

#### 5.13 MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

A planned maintenance programme should be drawn up and assigned to appropriately qualified staff or outside contractors.

#### 5.14 MAINTENANCE REGISTER

A maintenance register should be put in place to record all work carried out and problems identified.

#### 5.15 MONITORING

The installation of a remote damp recording system in the attic of the central block should be considered. This will minimise potential future damage to the important interiors.

#### 5.16 HOUSEKEEPING MANUAL

A housekeeping manual should be prepared by the staff and specialist advisors. This will cover detailed specifications for regular cleaning and maintenance of the interior fabric, measures for protection from visitor wear and tear, and conservation methodologies.

## 5.17 LONG-TERM REPAIR AND CONSERVATION

Based on the recommendations in Appendix III, a long-term (5-10 year) repair and conservation plan for the house, courtyard and estate buildings should be prepared. This work should be carried out in accordance with detailed specifications to accepted historic building conservation standards.

## POLICIES RELATING TO SERVICES INSTALLATIONS

### 5.18 SERVICES REVIEW

Carry out a complete review of all services installations that relate to the safety and security of the house, estate buildings and collections. Works should be prioritised on the basis of a risk assessment and available resources. The risk assessment should be based on the following criteria:

- Fire risks to buildings, occupants and contents, including lightning protection and fire-fighting measures.
- Risk of water leakages from first floor piped services in central block.
- Security risks to house and collections.
- Health and safety risks to occupants (*e.g.* asbestos, Radon) and compliance with statutory requirements.

### 5.19 FIRE PRECAUTIONS AND FIRE-FIGHTING

- Carry out a review of installed smoke and fire detection systems and upgrade to meet current standards. This should include consideration of air-sampling systems, 24-hour monitoring and call-out procedures. The review should also consider staff training and evacuation procedures, alarm and emergency lighting systems. Extra fire precautions should be put in place for the annual Candlelight Evening.
- All light fittings should have low heat output and be designed to minimise fire risk.
- As a matter of priority, a comprehensive lightning protection system should be installed.
- Install a hydrant ring main around the house. This would be fed from the (refilled) rear lake and piped supply (with underground tank if required), enabling effective fire-fighting. This will also allow the removal of the intrusive water tank on the rear screen wall.
- Review all portable fire-fighting equipment to ensure effectiveness, minimising damage to house contents and maximising ease of use.

## 5.20 WATER DAMAGE

First-floor services to bathrooms in the main block should remain drained down. First-floor heating pipes in main block should be sleeved to minimise risk of leaks. Review all water-based pipework throughout the building to minimise risk of leaks.

## 5.21 SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES

Prepare an environmental masterplan to inform decisions on the renewal or installation of services provisions. This should consider the following issues and include an assessment of capital and life cycle costs and payback periods.

- Reduce operating energy consumption — both passive and active systems.
- Review the potential for renewable energy sources.
- Use low-energy, low-maintenance light fittings, where this is compatible with historic character and ambience.
- Review the entire soils and waste management system to protect water supply and ground water. Consider using a packaged two-stage treatment plant with reedbed tertiary treatment, all integrated into landscape management proposals.
- Minimise water consumption.

## POLICIES RELATING TO THE COLLECTIONS

## 5.22 SETTING FOR THE COLLECTIONS

The historic use of the house as a setting for highly significant collections of fine art should be maintained and enhanced. The already close links with the National Gallery of Ireland should be strengthened in relation to security and the protection of the Collections. The potential for enhanced uses should focus on this aspect of the significance of the place.

## 5.23 ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Proposals for upgrading environmental conditions which are compatible with the historic integrity of the house should be agreed in consultation with the National Gallery of Ireland. These should be based on the results of the 12-month monitoring of existing environmental conditions and matched against recommended environmental standards for art galleries.

## 5.24 EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Prepare and adopt a detailed emergency planning strategy which should include:

- Call-out lists and procedures for staff and volunteers
- A contents rescue priority plan and designation of safe storage areas
- Staff training procedures
- A register of specialist conservators

## 5.25 RECORD DRAWINGS AND DOCUMENTATION

A comprehensive inventory of the contents of Russborough should be prepared, including:

- record photographs/drawings of locations of objects within rooms
- details of ownership/provenance

Copies should be held off-site at secure locations.



Plates 65 and 66: Glasshouses in the Walled Garden

## 5.26 SECURITY

A comprehensive review of security measures for the house and collections should be undertaken in collaboration with the National Gallery of Ireland. This should achieve levels of security that would allow loans of other collections to Russborough, as well as enhancing the security of the Beit Collection.

## 5.27 MERCHANDISING

The value of the collections should contribute to the resources which maintain Russborough by developing the merchandising opportunities. This should be incorporated in the Business Plan recommended in Section 6.2. Copyright issues need to be determined.

## 5.28 ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS FOR THE COLLECTIONS

Carry out 12-month monitoring of existing environmental conditions. This will contribute to policies for the Collections, as outlined in Section 5.23.

## 5.29 SECURITY AND ACCESS CONTROLS

Carry out a comprehensive review of security and access controls, with specialist advice and guidance from the National Gallery of Ireland.

## POLICIES RELATING TO OTHER ESTATE FEATURES

## 5.30 USES

Appropriate uses should be found for the underused estate buildings in the context of the overall Visitor Management Strategy, as buildings in use are more likely to be properly maintained.

Repair structural landscape features at risk, including leaking pond dams. Survey, identify and reinstate water supplies to the surviving historic water bodies.

## 5.31 REPAIRS AND RESTORATION

Conserve surviving historic fabric and features of the Walled Garden. Restore those parts which can be subsequently sustained through appropriate horticultural or visitor use.

- Restore cast iron glasshouse framing and panels.
- Repair all surviving fabric to conservation standards.
- Instigate study of spalling brickwork and prepare repair strategies.
- Restore South Terrace, Ha-Ha and Railings.
- Replace loose gravel with finer self-binding gravel, as 1937 photograph.
- Resurface tarmac to approach roads, with resin-bound gravel top dressing to match.
- Reduce planting to areas as shown in 1839 and as 1937 photograph.
- Retain and repair iron railings to Ha-Ha. Re-cut and re-turf slope of earth built up around railings.
- Stabilise foundations and repoint stone obelisks to field gates.
- Retain and repair iron railings and gates across south façade terrace.

### 5.32 LADY'S ISLAND

The Lady's Island requires further survey and record of planting before a detailed management plan can be prepared. The following broad principles are proposed.

- Repair footbridge.
- Provide discretely located flat-bed footbridge for access for garden machinery.
- Coppice invasive trees, repair banks, leaks and supply, weed out scrub.
- Adopt simple water's edge planting.



Plate 67: The footbridge leading to Lady's Island

### 5.33 LIME KILN

Conserve the Lime Kiln by cutting down trees and killing stumps. Repair to prevent further decay. Cordon off from livestock.

### 5.34 INTRUSIVE SERVICES

Remove visually intrusive fences and overhead cables which are at odds with the historic record. Burial of cables should be subject to prior archaeological assessment.

### 5.35 ICE HOUSE

Conserve and repair the Ice House.

## POLICIES RELATING TO VISITOR MANAGEMENT

All aspects of visitor management and provision of visitor facilities should be measured against their effect on the integrity and significance of Russborough.

### 5.36 TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

To prevent further damage to the main gate, an alternative access point should be created. Subject to detailed survey and discussions with Planning Authorities, the preferred location is through the estate wall into the paddock to the east of the Walled Garden. This has already received Planning Permission.

To remove car parking on the main driveway and close to the house, additional car and coach parking should be located in the well-enclosed paddock to the east of the Walled Garden (subject to prior archaeological survey). Disabled-user car parking should remain in the middle East Courtyard, with coach drop-off in the outer East Courtyard.

Visitor access circuits and estate maintenance routes should follow the historic routes. Appropriate new uses of the western service buildings could re-use the historic western access drives.

### 5.37 TICKETING AND CHARGING

The Business Plan proposed in Section 6.2 should develop a charging strategy for the house and estate, based on the enhanced access and attraction of visitor facilities.

### 5.38 VISITOR ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

- Provide disabled access to (as a minimum) the ground floor of the central block and preferably the basement. This should be done in a sensitive manner which is compatible with the retention of historic character and integrity.
- Strengthen the first floor, thus allowing visitor tours which will not do damage to the historic fabric.
- Commission a review of the Main Stair to determine potential for visitor use. Review the service stair to establish whether the intrusive steelwork can be removed.

### 5.39 VISITOR FACILITIES

Although the provision of high-quality visitor facilities is crucial to the economic viability of Russborough, any development carries risks to the integrity of the estate. The visitor facilities should be developed in accordance with the recommendations of the Visitor Facility Study in Appendix VI. This study is based on the following principles:

- Maximise the retention of historic fabric.
- Minimise risk to historic fabric and character.
- Where compatible with the first two principles, sympathetic re-use and investment in existing buildings should take precedence over the construction of new buildings.

This Plan also includes proposals for viable and compatible uses for the estate buildings.

### 5.40 CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS

Monitor visitor wear and damage to assess effects and identify protective measures. In time, this will lead to an assessment of acceptable capacity limits which will, in turn, influence visitor management procedures.

## **POLICIES RELATING TO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

### **5.41 DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESOURCE**

Russborough should be further developed as a fine art visitor attraction with enhanced visitor facilities which will generate increased income for sustaining the historic integrity of the House and Estate.

The attraction and accessibility of the estate should be enhanced by the restoration of the historic landscape and by providing access and information to visitors.

### **5.42 STAFF RESOURCES**

With the increased usage envisaged, more staff (paid or volunteers) will be required, creating even greater necessity for manuals and set procedures, particularly in the fields of Housekeeping, Maintenance and Emergency Planning. It is important that this is addressed while the current staff are in place in order to draw on their knowledge and ensure continuity.

### **5.43 FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

- Develop the commercial potential of Russborough, as outlined in the Visitor Facility Study.
- Provide new uses for unused estate buildings in the East and West Courtyards and the Walled Garden which are compatible with the retention of the historic character and integrity of the Estate.
- Develop marketing potential of the Collections and the Estate.
- Extend the visitor season by developing use by coach parties, education groups and corporate events.

### **5.44 BUSINESS PLAN**

All decisions for investment in new or enhanced visitor facilities should be based on a detailed Visitor Survey and an Economic Appraisal/Business Plan. This should be commissioned as soon as possible.

A fund-raising strategy should be drawn up which is based on the Conservation Plan and the Business Plan.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION, MANAGEMENT AND REVIEW**

### **6.1 IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT**

It is recommended that the Board of Trustees appoint a small team to implement the policies detailed in this Plan. This team should co-opt specialist advisors (e.g. on artwork conservation, security etc.) and appoint appropriate consultants as required. The team should report regularly to the Board of Trustees to monitor progress, support and guidance.

### **6.2 BUSINESS PLAN**

The first task for this team should be to commission the Economic Appraisal/Business Plan to assess the potential for the new and enhanced visitor facilities. This (together with this Conservation Plan) is key to securing support from most funding bodies.

### **6.3 VISITOR SURVEY**

The Business Plan will need accurate visitor survey information. This should be initiated as soon as practical, with the methodology based on industry best practice.

### **6.4 REVIEW PROCEDURES**

This Conservation Plan should be a living document, regularly referred to in order to inform discussions on Conservation and Management.

There should be formal reviews of the Plan every five years, co-ordinated with the recommended quinquennial Building Surveys.



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Historical research was carried out using the following resources: The National Library; the National Archives; The Architectural Archive; The Map Library of Trinity College; The National Photographic Archive; The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) (National Monuments Section, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government [formerly Dúchas]); The Topographical Files of the National Museum and The Representative Church Body (RCB) Library. Research was hampered somewhat by a lack of papers relating to the early history of the estate. Sir Alfred Beit believed that this lack of primary documentation may be related to the fire of 1922 in the Four Courts, where many estate papers were housed (Beit, 1978). Whatever the reason, this lack of primary documentation has been confirmed and indeed commented upon by other writers and experts including David Griffin of the Architectural Archive (pers. comm.) and Guinness and Ryan (1971).

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