

History of Number 11 Fitzwilliam Square

Hughes History

The street patterns of Dublin between the canals reflect an evolution from medieval walled city to the classical urban design and planning of streets and squares within the Gardiner and Fitzwilliam estates. Fitzwilliam square is located on the south side of the city in an area once part of the land of Baggotsrath, acquired by the Fitzwilliam family in 1381. The development of the Fitzwilliam estate was stirred by James Fitzgerald, the Earl of Kildare, when he built Kildare House on Fitzwilliam's land in 1745. The lawns of Kildare House, later renamed Leinster House, faced east and led to plans to develop Merrion street and square in the 1750's and 1760's. Jonathan Barker's 1764 map of the planned Merrion square shows a street marked 'The Intended New Street', which corresponds with today's Fitzwilliam street and the east side of Fitzwilliam square, and is the first indication of plans to develop in this direction. Many houses in the map are shown to take the older architectural form of the 'Dutch Billy', obviously before the decision to build the houses in the uniform fashion and scale that is now known as the Georgian style. The intended Fitzwilliam square is first seen laid out in a survey map drawn by Pat and John Roe in 1789. Richard, 7th Lord Viscount Fitzwilliam granted the first 12 leases on Fitzwilliam square in 1791 and the Dublin Evening Post reported:

'A new square is planned at the rere of Baggot Street, in which lots are rapidly taken and the buildings are to be immediately commenced. The design is not without elegance and the execution, it is believed, will be correspondent'

Dublin Evening Post 18th June 1791

Although building was to commence immediately, by the close of the 18th Century only four houses had been completed on the north side of the square, seen clearly in William Faden's 'Plan of the City of Dublin', 1797. The slow progress of building reflected the unstable political situation in Dublin and Europe; particularly Dublin's diminished importance after the Act of Union. Seven of the original leases reverted back to Fitzwilliam due to rent arrears and the inability to build. One leaseholder wrote to Fitzwilliam's agent, Barbara Verschoyle saying, 'eject me if you will, I will be glad to get rid of my bargain' (Agent's Letter Book 1796-1820). Verschoyle wrote to Lord Fitzwilliam in 1797:

The situation in the country is truly melancholy – where it will end, God knows. Our bankers have stopped circulating cash which has occasioned great confusion – you may suppose that in all this distress that rents are not getting paid...the Union is the terror of everyone and I am sorry to say I am sure it will be...I fear the present buildings will fall into decay or at least not be kept in the style they ought.

(Agent's Letter Book 1796-1820)

Although the troubles of 1798, the Act of Union and Napoleonic wars meant the rest of the houses weren't complete until 1830, Verschoyle's fear that the houses would fall into disrepair proved unfounded. As Dublin's peers and gentry relocated to London, members of the 'liberal' professional classes took up residence in the fashionable squares of the Fitzwilliam estate. The author William Makepeace Thackeray wrote in his *A Summer Day in Dublin* in 1842:

Hence you come upon several old-fashioned, well-built, airy, stately streets, and through Fitzwilliam Square, a noble place, the garden of which is full of flowers and foliage. The leaves are green, and not black as in similar places in London; the red brick houses tall and handsome.

Building on the square was uneven. Generally construction commenced on the north side from 1797; on the west side from 1807; on the east side from 1816; and on the south side from 1823. In general the leases of Fitzwilliam square were acquired by speculators who erected houses in ones and twos and sold them off quickly. The plots of numbers 9 to 12 Fitzwilliam square were leased by Viscount Fitzwilliam to the merchant Nathaniel Calwell in 1814. Nathaniel Calwell was a stationer and state lottery office keeper operating out of number 28 College green at the start of the 19th Century. Calwell employed the builder and master carpenter Richard Knight to erect houses on these plots and they were completed in 1818. By deed dated 3rd March 1819 Calwell demised the new number 11 Fitzwilliam square to William Sharman Crawford of Warringstown, county Down for the sum of £1,250. Number 11 would act as the Dublin townhouse for this radical politician and tenant's rights advocate until 1824.

William Sharman married Mabel Crawford of Crawfordsburn, county Down on the 5th December 1805 and by royal licence added his wife's family name to his own. In 1811 he was sheriff of Down and in subsequent years persistently advocated Roman catholic emancipation. Crawford sought to improve the condition of the tenants on his large Ulster estates and he gave the fullest possible recognition to the Ulster tenant-right custom. After 1830 Crawford resolved to agitate for the conversion of the Ulster custom into a legal enactment and for its extension to the whole of Ireland. In 1835 he was returned to parliament as the member for Dundalk and soon declared himself an advanced radical on all political questions. Crawford was never on good terms with Daniel O'Connell and declined to support O'Connell's campaign for the repeal of the union, later proposing a federalist solution to the Irish question in opposition to O'Connell's Repeal Association. Crawford's brief tenure of number 11 Fitzwilliam square reflects the diminished importance of Dublin to political life in Ireland after the Act of Union. On the 5th June 1824 William Sharman Crawford sold number 11 to the spinster sisters Lucinda and Selina Molony from Kiltanon, county Clare. Lucinda died in November 1835. Selina continued living in the house until her death in 1864.

While many original features of number 11 Fitzwilliam square remain, a substantial amount of work was done to the building in the late 19th Century. Outside the original railings were replaced at some stage, breaking the sequence of original railings on the east side of the square. The fanlights both internal and external have been lost and replaced with plain glass. The original granite steps down to the basement area have been replaced with metal and the characteristic Georgian windowpanes are also lost. The entrance hall retains its original plaster work with quite elaborate cornice stucco work and central ceiling rosette. The hall also contains the original brass rail that is unique to Irish Georgian houses. Its exact purpose is a mystery but most assume it was simply an aid for gentleman removing their boots.

The front room on the ground floor was used as a small parlour or family room. It contains a 19th Century black Kilkenny marble fireplace. The larger back room of the ground floor would have been used as the dining room. It contains a more substantial original fireplace with inlaid red and green

tiles. The stucco work is also more elaborate with a delicate central rosette and elliptical garland. The room is lit by a large Wyatt window, though the original panes have been replaced by larger single sashes. At some stage stained glass windows were installed in the side sashes depicting the four seasons. The architraves above the doors throughout the building and the panelled walls in the hallways are probably later additions. This very elaborate joinery work is more reflective of the opulent Victorian period rather than the classical simplicity of the Georgians. Also, the intricate woodwork does not quite match the more restrained stucco work displayed throughout. The banister of the ground floor stairway is also a later addition, employing ornate wrought iron designs. It is difficult to estimate if these later additions were installed in stages or together. It is possible that all the work was done when the small ballroom or hall was appended to the rear of the building towards the close of the 19th Century.

The *piano nobile* on the first floor best reflects the elegance and grandeur of the original building. The front and back drawing rooms would have been where the owners of the house entertained their guests and it is here the plasterwork is most ornate. The rooms contain matching original white marble chimneypieces with later Victorian tiles. Both rooms contain a stucco frieze with an urn and floral design. The front room is lit by two long windows, spanned by a wrought iron balcony. The back drawing room is lit by a single large window with later Victorian stained glass. The rooms on the second floor contained the main bedrooms with the master bedroom at the front overlooking the square. The third floor would have contained rooms for children and nannies during periods when families occupied the house. Servants would have also lived in the basement. The cook's room was adjacent to the kitchen with a window that allowed the cook to monitor the kitchen area. Store rooms and servants' quarters also lined the corridor in the basement.

On 6th October 1864 James Molony, as the executor of Selina Molony's will, sold number 11 Fitzwilliam square to Marshal Neville Clarke of Graiguenoe Park, county Tipperary. Marshal's first son Charles was born two years later and number 11 was the Clarke family's Dublin residence until 1884. For the first time the house could fulfil its potential as an elegant family home. Marshal married Mary Pearson of Cheltenham in the year they moved into number 11. As the Clarke family grew the house would have become a hive of activity; a place where children were raised, domestic servants worked and guests were entertained. Ralph Lionel Clarke, Marshal's grandson, wrote of Marshal Neville in a pamphlet entitled *The Remarkable Mr Clarke*:

Marshal, the only son, on his marriage was a strikingly handsome man of 37, firm but delicate features and an intellectual forehead. Educated at Kilkenny College and T.C.D. (fellow commoner) he was called to the Irish Bar and bought a big house, No.11 Fitzwilliam Square. He did not do a great deal in the legal way, but kept a coachman and carriages, gave dinner parties, was a member of the Kildare Street Club; and had a large circle of friends. Here his six children were born. On the death of his father in 1879 he came in for Graiguenoe Park and divided his time between Holycross and Dublin, taking his children to and fro with him. His apparently ideal existence came to a tragic end in May 1884 when he caught a lung infection while supervising the building of an addition to Graiguenoe house.

Marshal's wife, Mary Elizabeth Pearson née Clarke was an accomplished artist. On the 28th March 1873 she wrote to her parents from number 11 Fitzwilliam square describing the typically Victorian

social engagements within the house:

We have charming weather at last. The easterly winds have departed for a season and my cough has gone with them. We were at a very pleasant tea at Lady King's yesterday and are going to another at Lady Nithervilles this afternoon. The Henry Shakerleys are quartered in Dublin. We have exchanged visits and I asked them to our first dinner party next week, they were pre-engaged, the only people who were so. On the 1st we expect the Granby Burkes, Laws, Boyles, Hemphills, Swiftes, Quinans, Mrs Atkinson, Mr Kenniens (an elderly bachelor of good fortune and family), Capt Sandes (ditto but not so old), Mr Codd the best amateur singer in Dublin and Mr Thompson, an agreeably rich and slightly musical young man. On the 3rd we expect Sir Arthur Phayre, Count d'Altoire who professes the combined attractions of being a Tipperary squire and a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, Colonel Meadow Taylor and daughters, Mr and Mrs Ormsby, the Galweys, Moore Tabershams, and Mr Walsh. On the 4th we dine with the Jessops and on the 5th Marshal goes to Graiguenoe. Such is our programme for next week.

Consider the house hosting dinner parties as described above. Guests arriving by carriage and greeted in the front parlour; a long dining table laden with the finest food and dinner service; the basement abuzz with the preparation of food and the logistics of service; then entertainment and conversation in front of open fires on the first floor *piano nobile*.

Mary and Marshal's children were born in number 11 Fitzwilliam square and would have spent their childhoods here and at Graiguenoe before attending school in England. Their children were Charles Neville, born 1866; Harriet Neville, born 1867; Marion Sarah, born 1869; Loftus Otway, born 1871; George Vernon, born 1873 and Marshal Falconer, born 1876. There was also a seventh child that died in infancy. A childhood picture book of Charles Neville Clarke survives in the Clarke family archives dating from around 1875, when Charles was 9 years old. One drawing depicts the nursery of number 11 which was on the third floor. It shows a nanny named Saunders washing baby Marshal Falconer in a small bath in front of an open fire. Two year old George Vernon, dressed as a little girl (typical of the time), plays with a toy cart. Other toys are strewn in the foreground: building blocks, a ball, and a miniature farmyard with animals. Simple furnishings and ornaments are also visible: the small bath; the cot with netting and a modest table in the background. Charles entitled this drawing: 'Saunders washing the baby and George with his cart and bricks'. It is poignant to consider that the toddler George grew up to be educated at Wellington and commissioned into the Royal Field Artillery at Woolwich before serving in the Boer War. On 8th April 1902 Captain George Vernon Clarke was killed in action while trying to rescue a wounded man of the battery he was commanding at Uitvlugt. The baby would become Lieutenant Colonel Marshal Falconer Clarke. He survived the Boer War and the Great War, received the Distinguished Service Order and retired to Glasbury, Wales. The young illustrator, Charles Neville Clarke inherited Graiguenoe upon the death of his father in 1884. Graiguenoe Park became a target for local republicans and was eventually burned down in 1923. Charles moved to England and was killed with his wife Bertha at the Regina Hotel during the German's third blitz of Bath on 26th April 1942.

The Clarkes were forced to leave number 11 Fitzwilliam square upon the death of Marshal Neville Clarke in 1884. His widow Mary Elizabeth moved to Tipperary to take a more active role in the running of Graiguenoe Park. On 11th May 1884 Mary wrote to her sister Harriet Grey describing the

death of her husband from pneumonia:

The light of my life has been quenched even sooner than I imagined possible. About 4 o'clock my dearest Marshal became rather excited and restless. An hour later his mind began to wander. He grew calmer and calmer, and at about 8 o'clock or half past I began to realise he was going away from me. He sank rapidly without pain or discomfort. His peaceful end saved me the pang of seeing him suffer...Oh what a tender affectionate father my children have lost!

A descendant of Marshal Clarke, Andrew Clarke wrote in December 2006 saying:

'We maintain a great affection for 11 Fitzwilliam Square as it is the only Clarke residence in Ireland still standing. I'm glad it is being well looked after'.

By deed dated 27th June 1884 Mary Elizabeth Clarke sold number 11 Fitzwilliam square to Robert Seeds. Number 11 would be home to three generations of the Seeds family until the 1950's when the Italian Cultural Institute acquired the building. Robert Seeds was a barrister and Q.C. who had unsuccessfully run for parliament in Belfast in 1878 and 1880. Before acquiring number 11 he had lived at 52 Rutland (Parnell) square with his wife Ada Charlotte Le Mottee, who hailed from Guernsey, and their son William. Robert and Ada also had a daughter named Roberta Seeds. Roberta was born on the very same day that Robert bought number 11 Fitzwilliam square, 27th June 1884. By coincidence 27th June was also the birthday of young William Seeds born in 1882, an auspicious date for the Seeds family indeed. Robert Seeds was Queen's Advocate General from 1887 until his death on 28th April 1892. His widow Ada Charlotte and their two children continued to live in number 11.

It was around this time that the small ballroom or hall was added to the rear of the building. The hall is executed in the style of renowned architect Sir Thomas Manley Deane and was built between 1889 and 1907, evidenced in the fact that the extension is visible in an OS survey of 1907 and not visible in a survey of 1889. It is possible that the extension and other work completed in the house, noted above, was prompted by the second marriage of Ada Charlotte Seeds in 1900 to Sir William Kaye, Private Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant. Sir William had an address at number 62 Fitzwilliam square and also resided at the Private Secretary's Lodge, Phoenix Park. Sir William had been a target of the radical Fenian group 'The Invincibles' during the notorious Phoenix Park murders. On 6th May 1882 the group assassinated the newly appointed Irish Chief Secretary and the Under Secretary with surgical knives in the Phoenix Park, an atrocity that horrified British public opinion. The group had intended to kill all three secretaries and Sir William had been a passenger of the carriage that was to transport the three men from Dublin Castle to the Vice-Regal Lodge. However at the last minute, as the carriage was moving off, Sir William was required within the Castle and thus escaped assassination. Sir William Kaye and Ada Seeds enjoyed only a year of marriage. On 14th June 1901 Ada was widowed for a second time when Sir William Kaye died in Clontarf. She retained both her husbands' names and was known as Lady Ada Charlotte Seeds Kaye until her death. Lady Seeds Kaye made separate bequests to St Patrick's and Christ Church Cathedrals in 1925 and 1926. An inscribed 'A treble' bell was installed in the bell tower of St Patrick's in 1925. The inscription reads: 'To the Glory of God; Erected by his wife in loving remembrance of Robert Seeds, J.P. L.L.D. Q.C. Queen's Advocate General'. The tower clock of Christ Church Cathedral was also restored in Seeds' memory.

A plaque commemorates this reading: 'The Tower Clock and Chimes were restored in loving memory of Robert Seeds, Q.C., L.L.D., Queen's Advocate General, by his widow. March 1926' (figure 13). Lady Ada Seeds Kaye died on 5th March 1929 and was interred with her first husband in Derriaghy graveyard, Lisburn, county Antrim.

Of Lady Seeds Kaye's children, William Seeds grew up in number 11 Fitzwilliam square and from an early age aimed for a foreign-service career that would include Russia. He spent the period from September 1899 to June 1900 in St Petersburg, where he lived with several Russian families, studying the culture and language. In 1904 he entered the diplomatic service and was posted to Washington DC, and later to capitals in Europe, the Far East and South America. On the 2nd April 1938 he was offered the position of British ambassador to the Soviet Union fulfilling his life-long ambition. He arrived in Moscow on 21 January 1939 to present his credentials to Mikhail Kalinin, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and impressed his audience by speaking Russian (figure 14). However, Stalinist Russia was very different from the one of Seeds' youth and he quickly became disillusioned. He wrote to Lord Halifax, British secretary of state for foreign affairs on 29th August 1939:

I am precluded by my guardian-devils of the police who dog my every movement abroad from any possibility of acquiring first-hand knowledge, or even impressions.

Seeds' main concern on the eve of World War II was the intended policy of the Soviet Union with regards international relations – whether Moscow would come to an accord with Britain and France, Germany or retreat into isolation. Seeds worked tirelessly in tripartite discussions with members of the Russian, French and British governments, suspicious, but genuinely unaware that a Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact would be signed on 23rd August 1939. Seeds wrote in his diary on the evening of August 22:

At 8pm I had interview with Molotov (Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs) when he pretended that it was our insincerity which had forced Russians to treat with Germany and I had at any rate satisfaction of talking to him of Russian 'bad faith' which annoyed him extremely.

On 2nd January 1940 Sir William Seeds and his wife returned to England on leave and they would not return to Moscow. Sir William Seeds eventually retired to Greece and died on the 2nd November 1973.

Sir William's sister Ada Roberta Seeds remained in number 11 and married John Windsor Roe in 1910. Captain John Windsor Roe was an officer in the Royal Field Artillery and must have served in India as he was part of the Indian Expeditionary Force during World War I. He died of his wounds at Bethune Hospital, France in August 1916. John was a grand-nephew of Marshal Neville Clarke providing a link with the previous owners of the house. Roberta Windsor Roe continued to live in number 11 Fitzwilliam square during her brother's difficult diplomatic assignment having reared her two sons, John and Robert. Roberta was the final resident of number 11 before the Italian Cultural Institute acquired the building in 1956. Her grandchildren remember 'Cuddy', as she was known, as an extravagant and larger than life character, extremely wealthy and distinguished. She enjoyed riding and hunting and was a grand lover of rugby. She left number 11 in 1954 and moved to

Inchicore.

At this stage the residential use of houses on Fitzwilliam square had greatly diminished. In subsequent years the houses were increasingly employed for commercial use, but fortunately a substantial amount of the original fabric of the square has remained intact. Number 11 is representative of the particularly wealthy and influential people that made Fitzwilliam square their home through the years: politicians, lawyers and the owners of large estates. Some of the men who grew up in number 11 became caught up in world events, serving in the Boer War, the Great War, and in the case of William Seeds, being heavily involved in the diplomatic wrangling prior to World War II. Now in its 190th year 11 Fitzwilliam square has successfully adapted to the varied needs of its diverse occupants; from William Sharman Crawford to the Italian Cultural Institute.