

Rosehill House

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Rosehill stands prominently to the south of Finglas Village overlooking Finglas Road (the Dual Carriageway), which was formerly the valley of Fionn – glas stream that gave Finglas its name. The date of its construction is uncertain and we will probably never know for certain who built Rosehill as records on the house are non-existent until 1837. However stylistically the house can be attributed to a circle of architects whose head was Sir Edward Lovett Pearce. Pearce (1699? – 1733) studied under Vanbrugh, entered the army, rose to rank of captain and later became M.P. for Ratoath. Amongst his students was Richard Cassels (he later anglicised his German name to Castle) who came to Dublin with Pearce as his assistant.

The Palladian architects were called upon to practically every house of consequence in the mid eighteenth century. Only one design, however in the extensive collections of Pearce's drawings contains features that approximate to Rosehill. Rathnally House in Co. Meath contains an octagonal drawing room facing south-east. Rosehill's octagonal reception hall also faces south –east (fig.1).

The facades of the two buildings contain striking similarities in style (fig.2) and although the houses are not classically palladian (a discipline that demands balance and restraint in design) the fact that Rathnally House is attributable to Pearce lends credence to the theory that Rosehill was either by the same person or someone close to him.

Of course one must point out that at the time little difference was seen (in middle class society) between the architect and the builder so that a commissioned builder would often borrow features, designs and styles that his employer liked. Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744) could write to a patron of architecture;

But shall (my lord) your just, your noble rules.
Fill half the land with imitating Fools.
Who of your balance little notice take.
And of one beauty many blunders make.

However the last word belongs to William Garner of Irish Architectural Archives who in his study of the house concludes, it would be rash to attribute Rose Hill to Pearce but the house certainly is by him or one of his circle.

The house is of palladian design as we have seen although not strictly classical. The bow of the stair hall on the south-east of the house and the extra window on the south wall are really not enough to condemn the house as un-palladian.

The features which figure strongly in the design of the house are firstly the octagonal reception hall, facing south and receiving the lion's share of daily sunshine; secondly the bowed staircase to the south –east of the house and the bowed (curved at one end) room. The third feature worth mentioning is the pair of lunette windows under roof gable ends on the west and east walls. Other attributes include the arched window in the "tower" which is formed by the bowed stair hall and is self noteworthy; also the severe north wall with only two chimneys to break its bareness. The architrave on the south-east wall is a new addition.

The interior of the house is in exceptional and An Foras Forbartha in 1983 gave it a priority grade of A in its inventory of interiors of architectural and artistic interest. The centre piece on the ceiling of the octagonal hall is significant and can be described as a filigree pattern of leaves twining from the centre. The ground floor room facing east, possibly the dining room, is simply decorated, the cornicing consisting of plaster ovolo moulding for the most part and the fireplace wall extending forward only minimally.

By far the most interesting and exciting room is that on the ground floor facing west, possibly the drawing room. This is oval at one end with the fireplace at the other; again the fireplace extends out slightly. The enrichment of cornicing is remarkable more so perhaps because the work is not stucco, but is carved in wood. The enrichments consist of two pilasters and cornicing in Greek Corinthian style; the pilasters are fluted and the capitals are finely carved. Between the pilasters there are two doors panelled and curved to compliment the wall; between them is a roman arched niche, recently uncovered. The centrepiece reflects the work on the walls of the room. None of the original master fireplaces are in place but obviously they too would reflect an overall room style.

Just as records for the house are non existent up to 1837, there are no records of occupants up to the same year. However a fairly comprehensive list has been drawn up dating from this period.

The first recorded resident of Rose hill was N. Doyle in 1837. He was followed by Patrick Curably esquire in 1848, the Richard Shaw (originally from Sandy hill in St. Margaret's town land in 1853. Shaw left in 1863 and Mr. William D. Daly moved there with Miss Daly, possibly his daughter. It changed hands again in 1869 when Mr L. Hart stayed there, but it wasn't until 1874 that rosehill received it's greatest prestige in the Bayly family, who were to make it their home there for the next 20 years.

One of the wealthiest families in the Co. Dublin area, the Baylys', headed by Charles A. Bayly, settled in Rosehill in 1874 and lent an air of prosperity to the Finglas Village area. They stayed for over 2 decades, bought a family vault in St. Canice's graveyard and became an intricate part of Finglas village life.

In 1905, William McCausland Sherwood took over Rosehill (now known as "Rosehill House") until the Saunderson family came to live there in 1911. The Saundersons' give an example of the kind of prosperous lifestyle which middle-class professional families led in the early 1900's.

Mr Henry Saunderson, head of family, the landholder, was married to Laura Saunderson. Both were Dublin City born, Protestant (Church of Ireland) and in their early thirties when they moved to Rosehill. After eight and a half years of marriage, they had four young children, three sons and one daughter. Mr Saunderson was a carriage builder by profession, not the most secure of occupations as it would soon be replaced by more mechanical means of transport.

However, the Saundersons could still afford the luxury of two young servant girls. Myrtle Vera Harvey (17) from Co. Cork and Kate Williamson (16) from Dublin. They were Church of Ireland like the family and it is probably interesting to note that they could both read and write. They probably stayed with the family for most of their lives and would have lived in 2 of the 3 basement dwellings used as servants quarters.

Mr. Saunderson would have made use of the coach house and stables attached to the house but would not have used the farming out houses e.g. the piggery, cow house, fowl house etc. as they were not needed for his profession. However, they remained as part of the Rosehill land for subsequent owners to use as they wished. When the Saundersons left in 1916, one such landowner arrived.

Patrick J. Derham was a farmer by profession and left Gofton Hall in Finglas town to live in Rosehill House. He brought with him, his wife Mary Derham and their 2 children. Unlike the Saundersons, they were traditional Roman Catholics and an older family, Mrs. Derham being in her late forties and her husband in his late fifties. They brought only one servant with them, Miss Ellen Christie, who stayed with them all her life. The Derhams lived in Rosehill House until the late 1940's after which the house is listed as vacant.

It wasn't until the late 1950's that a buyer was found for Rosehill. Mr. and Mrs. Jeff Fitzpatrick of Dublin lived in Rosehill for over three decades and in that time passed it on to their son, Geoffrey Fitzpatrick.

During the last few decades, "Rosehill" or "Rosehill House" has become known as "Rose Hill" (two separate words) to the local people. The house was sold 2 years ago to the Fingal Development Group who have plans to convert Rosehill into a business enterprise centre which they will sub-divide into enterprise units. With the help of FAS, the house is being renovated and restored to its original old-world grandeur. Outside the house the driveway is being completely re-routed and the gardens are being landscaped. The well which is to be found at the north-eastern corner of the house is at least 30 ft. and is finely corbelled. It is not long since the water was drinkable, now however, the well is poisoned.

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